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# THE VIRGIN BIRTH

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN  
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

(DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY)

BY

ALLAN HOREN

CHICAGO

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## THE VIRGIN BIRTH.

### I. THE NEW TESTAMENT.

THIS essay aims to trace the history and use of the story of the virgin birth of Jesus in the ante-Nicene Christian literature. In doing this, special attention is paid to the patristic field, which has not hitherto been thoroughly investigated with such a purpose in view. What is here offered on the New Testament material is introductory to the main body of the essay, and, as a prerequisite to tracing the use and effects of the New Testament stories in the subsequent Christian literature, aims to determine whether these narratives in reality represent a double or only a single attestation of the virgin birth, and also to ascertain what is their exact meaning.<sup>1</sup>

The question whether the account of the virgin birth has in the New Testament a single or a double attestation is, broadly speaking, the question of the common origin or independence of the infancy sections of Matthew and Luke. Resch<sup>2</sup> holds that Matthew and Luke used a pre-canonical child history, which had been translated from Hebrew into Greek, and that, if we had that history, it would be a harmony of the infancy stories of the first and third gospels. Conrady<sup>3</sup> thinks that the protevangelium of James is that pre-canonical source which both Matthew and Luke used, and that, moreover, Luke had access to Matthew's account. Whether the infancy stories are more independent than these theories would imply can be ascertained only by a comparative examination of the material.

The genealogies, Matt. 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38, may be first considered in such a comparison. The generations prior to Abraham are peculiar to Luke, and, while favoring the independence of the two tables, are probably more significant as indicating Luke's understanding of the virgin birth, as will be pointed out later. Between Abraham and David the two tables, having access to the Old Testament material,

<sup>1</sup>The pseudonymous and fictitious material which falls within the ante-Nicene period and is usually included under the title of the New Testament apocrypha will be briefly treated in an appendix, for the purpose of supplementing the study of the ante-Nicene Fathers.

<sup>2</sup>*Kindheitsevangelium nach Lucas und Matthaëus.*

<sup>3</sup>*Die Quelle der kanonischen Kindheitsgeschichte Jesu.*



are in harmony, but between David and Joseph, where one would expect them to be precise in proving the Davidic descent of Jesus, they are, with the possible exception of two names,<sup>4</sup> wholly at variance. Thus the genealogical tables as a whole make against the theory of a common source.<sup>5</sup> The explanation that Luke gives the genealogy of Mary is not substantiated or adequate.

Continuing this comparison, the question of the common dependence or the interdependence of the infancy sections can be better appreciated, perhaps, by a tabulation showing the material in either account.

MATTHEW.		LUKE.	
		Birth of John the Baptist promised,	1:5-25
		Annunciation to Mary,	1:20-38
Annunciation to Joseph,	1:18-25	Mary's visit to Elizabeth,	1:39-56
		Birth of John the Baptist,	1:57-80
		Birth of Jesus,	2:1-7
		The angels and the shepherds,	2:8-20
		The circumcision,	2:21
		Presentation in the temple,	2:22-39
The magi,	2:1-12		
Flight into Egypt and return to Nazareth,	2:13-23		
Childhood at Nazareth,	2:23	Childhood at Nazareth,	2:39, 40
		Incident in the temple,	2:41-50
		Eighteen years at Nazareth,	2:51, 52

It will be seen from the foregoing that Matthew and Luke are in agreement as to the birth-place, the parents' names, a residence in Nazareth after the birth, the Davidic descent, and the virgin birth. But all of these facts, except the last, are derivable from the gospels proper, or, as in the case of the Bethlehem birth, from such information as may easily be supposed to have been common Christian tradi-

<sup>4</sup> Shealtiel and Jerubbabel, Matt. 1:12; Luke 3:27.

<sup>5</sup> In connection with Matt. 1:16 it should be brought to notice that, although all the Greek uncials and nearly all the minuscules have "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ," the Curetonian Syriac, the Armenian, two Greek minuscules (346 and 556), and most of the old Latin versions have, "Joseph to whom the virgin Mary was betrothed begat Jesus who is called Christ," while the Sinaitic Syriac has, "And Joseph to whom the virgin Mary was betrothed begat Jesus Christ." The reading of the MS. recently discovered at Oxyrhynchus agrees with the Greek uncials.

tion (John 7:42).<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Matthew represents Bethlehem as the home of Joseph and Mary prior to their flight into Egypt, while Luke knows of no home for the sacred family except that of Nazareth, and is silent concerning the annunciation to Joseph, the star, the magi, the slaughter of the innocents, and the flight into Egypt. Matthew omits completely the story of John the Baptist, thus causing his gospel proper to begin with needless abruptness, were he in possession of the source used by Luke. Moreover, Matthew says nothing of the annunciation to Mary, or of Mary's visit to Elizabeth; nothing of the angels and the shepherds, the circumcision, the presentation in the temple, the incident in the temple at the age of twelve, and the youth spent in Nazareth.

Now, if we take a section from the gospel where Matthew and Luke are evidently dependent upon their common source, Mark, we can the better determine whether a similar dependence exists here. Taking the record of the second northern journey for retirement, beginning with Matt. 16:13 and Luke 9:18, the order of events is as follows:

	MATTHEW.	LUKE.
1. Peter's confession - - - - -	16:13-20	9:18-21
2. Death and resurrection foretold -	21-28	22-27
3. Transfiguration - - - - -	17:1-13	28-36
4. The demoniac boy - - - - -	14-20 <sup>7</sup>	37-43 <sup>a</sup>
5. Death and resurrection again foretold -	22, 23	43 <sup>b</sup> -45
6. The shekel in the fish's mouth - -	24-27 (Matthæan addition to common source)	
7. Discourse on humility and forgiveness - chap. 18		46-50

Comparing the substantial nature of this harmony of events with the comparative relation of events in the infancy sections, the evidence is against a common source in the latter case.

Having made this survey, it may be well to take up the two accounts of the virgin birth in order to ascertain whether there is evidence of a common source in this particular part of the infancy sections. This involves a comparison of Matt. 1:18-25 with Luke 1:26-38 and 2:6, 7; and, at the same time, of both with the parallel material of the gospel of James, in order to ascertain the value of the theory which makes it the common source of the canonical stories.

<sup>6</sup> This passage also indicates that the Bethlehem birth was not known in the lifetime of Jesus, but that it was a commonly accepted fact in the apostolic age. On the other hand, one must admit the possibility that the information presented in John 7:42 may be derived from the infancy story itself.

<sup>7</sup> Vs. 21 expunged as an interpolation.



Matthew and Luke are in harmony in their statement of the chief fact, that Mary was Joseph's betrothed, and prior to any sexual intercourse on their part conceived a son by the Spirit of God, and that such a conception was predictive of the child's future greatness. But in Luke the angel who announces this wonderful fact and names the unborn child is sent to Mary in Nazareth, while in Matthew the angel comes in a dream to Joseph, presumably in Bethlehem. The particular task of the one to be born is represented in Luke as ruling on the throne of David forever, and in Matthew as saving his people from their sins. In Luke his manner of birth warrants the epithet "God's Son," and in Matthew, "Immanuel."

The limits of the present article do not permit the insertion of the Greek text of these three accounts in such a way as to make clear all corresponding material, but from such an examination we are convinced that Conrady's thesis is untenable. The following extract from the gospel of James may be compared with the Lucan and Matthæan accounts, the verbal correspondence to Luke being roughly designated by italics, that to Matthew by capitals, and that to both by spaced type :

11. And she took the pitcher and went out to fill it with water. And behold a voice saying : *Hail, thou who hast received grace ; the Lord is with thee ; blessed art thou among women* (Luke 1 : 42). And she looked around on the right hand and on the left to see whence this voice came. And she went away trembling to her house, and put down the pitcher ; and taking the purple she sat down on her seat and drew it out. *And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before her, saying : Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor before the Lord of all, and thou shalt conceive according to his word.* And she hearing reasoned with herself, saying : Shall I conceive by the Lord, the living God ? and shall I bring forth as every woman brings forth ? (Luke 1 : 34). *And the angel of the Lord said : Not so, Mary : for the power of the Lord shall overshadow thee : wherefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the son of the Most High. And thou shalt call his name Jesus, FOR HE SHALL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS. And Mary said : Behold the servant of the Lord before his face ; let it be unto me according to thy word.*

13. And she was in her sixth month ; and behold, JOSEPH came back from his building, and entering into his house he DISCOVERED that she was big WITH CHILD. And he smote his face and threw himself upon the ground upon the sackcloth, and wept bitterly, saying : With what face shall I look upon the Lord my God, and what prayer shall I make about this maiden ? because I received her a virgin out of the temple of the Lord, and I have not watched over her. Who is it that has hunted me (her) down ?

Who has done this evil thing in my house and has defiled the virgin? Has not the history of Adam been repeated in me? For just as Adam was in the hour of his singing praise, and the serpent came and found Eve alone and completely deceived her, so it has happened to me also. And Joseph stood up from the sackcloth and called Mary and said unto her: Oh, thou who hast been cared for by God, why hast thou done this and forgotten the Lord thy God? Why hast thou brought low thy soul, thou who wast brought up in the holy of holies and that didst receive food from the hand of an angel? And she wept bitterly, saying: I am innocent, and have known no man. And Joseph said to her: Whence then is that which is in thy womb? And she said: As the Lord my God liveth, I do not know whence it is to me.

14. And Joseph was greatly afraid, and retired from her, and considered what he should do in regard to her. And Joseph said: If I conceal her sin, I find myself fighting against the law of the Lord; and if I expose her to the sons of Israel, I am afraid lest that which is in her be from an angel, and I shall be found giving up innocent blood to the doom of death. What then shall I do with her? I will put her away from me secretly. (Matt. 1:19.) And night came upon him; and BEHOLD, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARS TO HIM IN A DREAM, SAYING: BE NOT AFRAID for this maiden, FOR THAT WHICH IS IN HER IS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND SHE SHALL BRING FORTH A SON, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, FOR HE SHALL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS. AND JOSEPH AROSE FROM SLEEP and glorified the God of Israel who had given him this grace; and he kept her. . . .

19. And I said: I am seeking a Hebrew midwife. And she answered and said unto me: Art thou of Israel? And I said unto her: Yes. And she said: And who is it that is bringing forth in the cave?<sup>8</sup> And I said: A woman betrothed to me. And she said to me: Is she not thy wife? And I said to her: It is Mary who was reared in the temple of the Lord, and I obtained her by lot as my wife. And yet she is not my wife, but has conceived OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. (Matt. 1:18, 25.) And the midwife said to him: Is this true? And Joseph said to her: Come and see. And the midwife went away with him. And they stood in the place of the cave, and behold, a luminous cloud overshadowed the cave. And the midwife said: My soul has been magnified this day, because mine eyes have seen strange things—because salvation has been brought forth to Israel. (Luke 1:46, 68 ff.) And immediately the cloud disappeared out of the cave and a great light shone in the cave so that the eyes could not bear it. And in a little that light gradually decreased until the infant appeared and went and took the breast from his mother Mary.<sup>9</sup> And the midwife cried out and said:

<sup>8</sup> The gospel of James represents this cave as being within three miles of Bethlehem.

<sup>9</sup> Contrast Luke 2:6, 7.



This is a great day to me because I have seen this strange sight. And the midwife went forth out of the cave and Salome met her. And she said to her: Salome, Salome, I have a strange sight to relate to thee: A virgin has brought forth—a thing which her nature admits not of. Then said Salome: As the Lord my God liveth, unless I thrust in my finger and search the parts, I will not believe that a virgin has brought forth.

20. And the midwife went in and said to Mary: Show thyself, for no small controversy has arisen about thee. And Salome put in her finger and cried out and said: Woe is me for mine iniquity and mine unbelief, because I have tempted the living God; and behold my hand is dropping off as if burned by fire.

Anyone who is acquainted with the story-making habit, the extravagant characteristics of the apocryphal literature as a whole, or even with the tendency in New Testament interpolation, cannot hold Matthew and Luke to be deductions from this gospel of James. The gospel of James seems rather to be the fanciful working out of the canonical stories; and, while it is difficult to account for the placing of the birth in a cave near Bethlehem, this may be a creation of fancy, the better to set off the miraculous illumination at the time of birth; or the invention may have been favored by the Septuagint translation of Isa. 33:16.<sup>10</sup>

Contrast with the above extract such samples of verbal dependence<sup>11</sup> as Matt. 3:7-10 and Luke 3:7-9, or Matt. 12:43-45 and Luke 11:24-26; or take the threefold account of Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees,<sup>12</sup> Matt. 21:23-27, Luke 20:1-8, derived from Mark 11:27-33, and judge whether there is sufficient ground in the canonical stories of the virgin birth for supposing them to be dependent upon each other or upon the prolix vulgarity of the gospel of James. Indeed, the instances cited, together with such passages as Mark 12:13-27, 13:5-9, and parallels, serve to indicate the true nature of verbal dependence, and, taken with the comparison of the narratives as a whole, to warrant the conclusion that where the virgin-birth story first appears it is attested by two witnesses which betray no certain sign of dependence of one upon the other or of both upon a common source.

<sup>10</sup> See WESTCOTT, *Canon of the New Testament*, p. 102, note 7.

<sup>11</sup> See HUCK, *Synopse der drei ersten Evangelien*, p. 17, where out of the 147 words composing the two accounts 130 are identical and arranged in the same order. For the second example see HUCK, p. 54, where out of the 126 words of the two accounts 104 are identical and in the same order. Also RUSHBROOK, *Synopticon*, pp. 136, 159.

<sup>12</sup> See HUCK, pp. 118 ff., where of some 356 words composing the three accounts about 200 are identical and in the same order. See also RUSHBROOK, *Synopticon*, p. 81.

It is now necessary, before proceeding to trace the influence of the narratives of the virgin birth on the subsequent Christian literature, to get as clear an idea as possible of the meaning of the story in the earliest forms preserved to us. Matthew's thought seems to be that the wonder-working Spirit of God, exclusive of human agency, caused Mary to conceive; that, by reason of this fact, she was innocent of any wrong such as that the suspicion of which had troubled Joseph; and that at the same time such a birth, being in accord with the Immanuel prophecy, marked the child to be born as the Messiah, the Savior of his people, as the one spoken of in Isa., chaps. 7 and 8, to be the deliverer of his nation in the impending war. Thus the application of the prophetic and symbolic expression "Immanuel" was not for the purpose of designating the nature of the child, but rather his work, which was to be national and messianic. The result of the nation's sins was always the withdrawal of God; but the Messiah would lead them in righteousness and save them from that abandoning by God which was at the same time the result of their sins and the cause of their impotence and subjection. The term "Immanuel," then, is the prophetic and symbolic designation for Savior; but that it soon came to be used as designating the divine nature of Christ will appear from the study of the patristic literature.

The meaning of Luke's account of the virgin birth is not so clear, perhaps, but, like Matthew's, is destitute of any attempt to explain the divine nature of Jesus upon the basis that God, and not a human father, was his begetter. In reply to Mary's question (1:34), the angel says: "Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and power of Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also the begotten thing shall be called holy, Son of God." In other words, the pure Spirit of God will cause Mary to conceive *miraculously*, and thus, in contrast to the *polluted offspring* of any human begetter, who would be a sinful descendant of Adam, the child shall be *pure* as the begetting Spirit is pure. This is one element in the angel's annunciation—the purity of the child through the action of the Holy Spirit and the breaking of the line of sinful Adam's descent. The other is that the creative power of God is to act directly in this creation, as it did in that of Adam, the first man, who because of his direct creation by God is called God's son (*cf.* 3:38, "the son of Adam, the son of God"). In like manner shall this one, whose holiness is secured by the breaking of the sinful Adamic descent, be termed Son of God because directly created by divine power.

This is undoubtedly the *basis* for the use of the term "Son of God"



in this passage; but has the term no larger content than that which applies equally to Adam? There are two other possibilities: first, that it is equivalent to "Messiah;" and, second, that it designates moral likeness to God. In support of the former contention it can be pointed out that this passage in Luke is clearly messianic, as is seen in vss. 32 and 33, and also in the psalms interspersed throughout the narrative. Moreover, the probable use of the term "Son of God" as a messianic title can be appealed to in Matt. 16:16 (but not in Mark 3:11; 5:7; 15:39; nor in Luke 3:22; 4:3, 9; 9:35). For the view that it designates moral likeness to God it can be shown that the thought is thus made parallel to the preceding thought of purity and is brought into harmony with the Jewish conception of the original purity of Adam, avoiding at the same time a use of the term "Son of God" which cannot with certainty be attributed to any part of the New Testament except its latest elements.

Adopting any one of these three possible interpretations, however, there is in the passage no explanation of the divine nature of Jesus on the basis of divine parentage, but at most only a statement and partial explanation of his purity (in Matthew more specifically an exoneration of the purity of Mary's conception, and in Luke of the purity of Jesus from the hereditary Adamic sin), and a prophecy of his greatness as the theocratic representative. Both accounts have the national messianic coloring, but in neither of them is there represented an incarnation of a pre-existent being, such as is set forth in the prologue to John's gospel. The natural deductions made from the terms "Immanuel" and "Son of God" by the subsequent Christian literature, and the embarrassing attempts to harmonize the synoptists with the prologue of the fourth gospel, will be pointed out in the next section.

Passing from the infancy sections, we find no use of them (unless possibly John 7:42) or of the virgin birth prior to Ignatius, in the second decade of the second century. The narrative of the virgin birth, if in existence, made no impression upon the exponents of Christianity prior to the formation and crystallization of the preaching gospel, or, indeed, within the period in which the New Testament books—most of them, at least—arose. There is no trace of it in Peter's preaching, as preserved to us; and Paul, though it would seem that he could have made occasional good use of the teaching,<sup>13</sup> preserves a significant silence; Matthew's gospel, from 3:1 on, depending

<sup>13</sup> *E. g.*, 1 Cor. 15:45 ff.; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:12 ff.; 8:3; Phil. 2:6 ff.; *et al.*

upon Mark, is also silent; and that portion of the gospel of Luke which, as we judge from 1:2 and Acts 1:21, 22, constituted for him the gospel proper, viz., that which began, like Mark, with the public ministry of Jesus as inaugurated by John the Baptist, is likewise destitute of any trace of the virgin-birth story. The gospel of John is also silent.<sup>44</sup> What these facts signify as to the source of the story and the time of its rise is not the task of this essay, which passes to consider the history of the thought as traceable in the patristic literature.

## II. THE ANTE-NICENE FATHERS.

In entering upon a study of the ante-Nicene Fathers in their treatment of the virgin birth, we are interested to know what sources they used, what was the influence of extra-canonical sources upon their views, and the time when this influence becomes discoverable. It is also desirable to ascertain what sources the so-called heretical teachers and writers used, and what various theories of the virgin birth were advanced by them; and also to determine what the Fathers understood the virgin birth to mean, and what theological purpose they made it serve. With a view to answering these questions, and conscious of the fact that in the absence of any New Testament interpretation, save the meager hints of the infancy sections themselves, the interpretation of the Fathers became and remained the interpretation of the church at large, the study of this vast and not always interesting field is undertaken.

I. IGNATIUS, second bishop of Antioch,<sup>45</sup> martyred between 107 and 117 A.D., is the first and sole apostolic Father to leave us any material on the miraculous generation of Jesus. Not only so, but all the apostolic Fathers, save Ignatius and Aristides, in the Syriac version of his Apology, maintain a uniform and notable silence concerning the story of the birth and infancy of Jesus. In Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Barnabas, the Didaché, the Epistle to Diognetus, and the Shepherd of Hermas we look in vain for any reference either to the miraculous conception itself or to the infancy story of which the miraculous conception was the most striking feature.

It is true that in Clement, *Epistles*, 1:32, there is an obscure reference to the descent of Jesus Christ from Jacob (?) according to the

<sup>44</sup>That the *gospel* narratives are quite oblivious to the fact of the virgin birth is most obvious in such passages as Matt. 13:54-58=Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:22; John 1:45; 6:42; 7:5, 27; while at the same time the infancy section itself does not present an apparently uniform statement, Luke 2:33, 41, 43, 48.

<sup>45</sup>EUSEBIUS, *Church History*, Books III, XXII, and XXXVI.



flesh, but the obscurity of the passage and its probable derivation from Rom. 9 : 5 leave the writings of Clement destitute of any reference to the infancy sections. Moreover, it is not as if the apostolic Fathers had no occasion to use the story of the virgin birth of Jesus; for Polycarp in his *Epistle*, chap. 7, quotes 1 John 4 : 3, "Whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is Anti-Christ," and in chap. 12 he maintains that Jesus is the Son of God; yet in both these places, where it would be natural and in keeping with the custom of so many of the ante-Nicene writers to refer to the infancy story, he is silent.

Likewise in Barnabas, chap. 6, while there is a reference to the fact and purpose of the incarnation, a similar silence is maintained. "The Son of God therefore came in the flesh with this view, that he might bring to a head the sum of their sins who had persecuted his (their) prophets to the death." The same is true of Diognetus, chap. 7, where there is a statement of how and for what purpose God sent his Son, and in chaps. 10 and 11, where John's doctrine of the Word and mention of the only-begotten Son appear, but without reference to the infancy story. The Shepherd has no reference to Matthew's gospel prior to the Sermon on the Mount, and none to Luke's prior to the eleventh chapter. Neither has the Didaché any reference to Matthew prior to chap. 5, or to Luke prior to chap. 6. Ignatius has nothing to say about gospels, but mentions only the gospel which is an account of Jesus Christ, whom he accepts in place of all that is ancient and authoritative (*Philad.*, chap. 8), and which, with one exception (Rom., chap. 7, referring to John 6 : 51), seems to coincide with the gospel as we have it in Matthew.

The Ignatian controversy,<sup>16</sup> extending from 1495 to the present time, has succeeded in thoroughly discrediting the longer Greek recension with the eight additional epistles, including the three in Latin. It has also pointed toward the conclusion that the Syriac version of the epistles to Polycarp, Ephesians, and Romans is but an imperfect series of extracts from the shorter Greek form of the seven usually accepted epistles; and that the genuineness of this shorter Greek form itself is not in every respect beyond question. The free tampering with the text which makes against the high valuation of the later Fathers as textual evidence, necessarily discounts to some degree the patristic

<sup>16</sup>LIGHTFOOT, *The Apostolic Fathers, S. Ignatius and S. Polycarp*, Vol. I, pp. 315-414; THEODOSIUS ZAHN, *Ignatius von Antiochien*. For bibliography see SCHAFF, *History of Christian Church*, Vol. II, pp. 652, 653.

writings which deal with the supernatural birth. But to just what degree is difficult to ascertain. In the shorter Greek version, however, Ignatius awakens little or no suspicion of reflecting the thought of a later time; he rather exhibits the pre-theological naïveté natural to his time and his teaching, if he were a disciple of Paul or Peter or John. His reference to the supernatural birth of Christ is that of unquestioning and unphilosophic statement. In *Eph.*, chap. 7 (I, 52),<sup>17</sup> he says that Jesus Christ is "of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate—(son) both of Mary and of God."<sup>18</sup> In chap. 18 (I, 57) he says: "For our God,<sup>19</sup> Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary, according to a dispensation of God, of the seed of David, but also of the Holy Spirit;"<sup>20</sup> and in chap. 19 (I, 57): "And hidden from the prince of this world were the virginity of Mary and her child-bearing."<sup>21</sup> In the same chapter the incarnation is regarded as "God himself being manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life,"<sup>22</sup> and in chap. 20 the manner of Christ's generation is taken to explain his being Son of man and Son of God.<sup>23</sup> In *Smyrn.*, chap. 1 (I, 86), there is perhaps as full a statement as any: "He was truly of the seed of David according to the flesh, and the Son of God according to the will and power of God. He was truly born of a virgin, was baptized by John, in order that all righteousness might be fulfilled by him."<sup>24</sup>

From *Magnesians*, chap. 11, we learn that the birth, passion, and res-

<sup>17</sup> The citations in parentheses refer to the American reprint of the Edinburgh edition of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, revised by A. C. COXE, D.D. New York: Scribner, 1899.

<sup>18</sup> IGNATIUS, *Ephesians*, VII, 2: Εἰς ἱατρὸς ἐστὶν σαρκικός τε καὶ πνευματικός, γεννητὸς καὶ ἀγέννητος, ἐν σαρκὶ γενόμενος θεὸς, ἐν θανάτῳ ζωὴ ἀληθινὴ, καὶ ἐκ Μαρίας καὶ ἐκ θεοῦ. The longer version amplifies this, quoting, "For the Word was made flesh."

<sup>19</sup> See also *ibid.*, 20, and *Trall.*, 9. The longer version amplifies this, quoting part of the Immanuel prophecy of Isa. 7:14.

<sup>20</sup> IGNATIUS, *Ephesians*, XVIII, 2: Ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστὸς ἐκνοφορήθη ὑπὸ Μαρίας κατ' οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ ἐκ σπέρματος μὲν Δαβὶδ, πνεύματος δὲ ἁγίου.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX, 1: Καὶ ἔλαθεν τὸν ἀρχοντα τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἡ παρθένα Μαρίας καὶ ὁ τοκετὸς αὐτῆς κ. τ. λ.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX, 3: Θεοῦ ἀνθρωπίνως φανερούμενου εἰς καινότητα αἰῶλου ζωῆς.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, XX, 2: ἐν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, τῷ κατὰ σάρκα ἐκ γένους Δαβὶδ, τῷ νιῷ ἀνθρώπου καὶ νιῷ θεοῦ κ. τ. λ.

<sup>24</sup> IGNATIUS, *Smyrn.*, I: ἀληθῶς ὄντα ἐκ γένους Δαβὶδ κατὰ σάρκα, νίδν θεοῦ κατὰ θέλημα καὶ δύναμιν θεοῦ γεγεννημένον ἀληθῶς ἐκ παρθένου, βεβαπτισμένον ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου ἵνα πληρωθῇ πάντα δικαιοσύνη ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.



urrection constitute a trio of vital items in the Christian faith; and an odd passage in *Trall.*, chap. 9, speaks of "Jesus Christ who was from the race of David, who was the son of Mary."<sup>25</sup>

From the spurious material one may learn something of the trend and extent which the more inventive Christian literature soon assumed in order to combat Doceticism, Patripassianism, and various forms of the Gnostic heresy. From the material cited and quoted above at least the outstanding features of Ignatius's belief touching the virgin birth may be ascertained. He believed (1) that Christ was conceived in the womb of Mary; (2) that part of him was composed of flesh and part of spirit; (3) the former generate, the latter ingenerate; (4) the former derived of Mary, the latter of God; (5) that he was of Davidic descent; (6) that his mother was a virgin; and (7) that the fact of her as a virgin bearing a child was, with some other essential Christian truths, hidden from the prince of this world.

It will be seen that, while this statement of the matter is unphilosophical, it is nevertheless not so simple as that contained in Matt. 1: 18-25 and Luke 1: 26-38. There the thought is that the Spirit or Power of God coming upon Mary causes her to conceive directly and apart from any agency; and, while it is true that Luke 1: 35 points out a consequent characteristic of the son to be born, it by no means goes so far as to affirm the dual nature of Christ upon the basis of the announced miraculous conception.

In concluding this study of Ignatius, it is important to point out (1) what are his sources, (2) what was his understanding of them, and (3) what increment he makes to the study; and this order of summary will be adhered to in the case of each writer with whom we have to deal.

1. In so far as Ignatius reproduces or uses the story of the virgin birth or of the infancy, he shows no knowledge of any events or facts beyond those contained in the canonical gospels. Here, as uniformly in his writings, the facts are accounted for by his use of a gospel corresponding to our Matthew, unless he also reflects, as shall be pointed out, something of the influence of the Johannine prologue. His emphasis upon the star in *Eph.*, chap. 19, is only a rhetorical adornment of what is in the Matthæan source.

2. It is very clear that Ignatius makes the dual parentage the basis of the dual nature of Jesus; and it is almost as clear that he predicates pre-existence for the divine element in the nature of Jesus. His representation of the matter is not thoroughly uniform, however, for

<sup>25</sup> IGNATIUS, *Trall.*, IX: τοῦ ἐκ γένους Δαβὶδ, τοῦ ἐκ Μαρίας.





The Syriac version gives evidence of being an early and expansive paraphrase of the genuine Greek text.<sup>28</sup> Although the passage here quoted has nothing corresponding to it in the Greek, it no doubt represents an early second-century and possibly Antiochian belief. In tracing the doctrine of the virgin birth, this Syriac document is to be admitted in evidence, but the interrogation point as to exact date must be retained. Now, this Syriac interpolation states three things: (1) that God came down from heaven and took his abode in a Hebrew virgin from whom he assumed flesh; (2) that in this state he is the Son of God; and (3) that this belief is a part of the gospel recently preached among the Christians.

1. It is clear that Aristides used John and Matthew or Luke.

2. He states the pre-existence as deity of him who was born of Mary, and who, being born of Mary, is also Son of God; but he nowhere indicates how he relates these two conceptions to each other. The virgin birth is distinctly an incarnation.

3. This is a decided divergence from the two synoptic accounts, and also an advance upon, and an alteration of, the teaching of John, which sets forth an incarnation of the Word. What was dimly present in Ignatius became clearly defined in Aristides, who attempted to fuse a misinterpretation of the philosophy of John's prologue with the story of the miraculous birth in the first and third gospels. Thus Aristides denaturalized the birth beyond what is taught in the gospels or in Ignatius.

III. JUSTIN MARTYR<sup>29</sup> (about 110-66 A. D.). The extant material of Justin bearing on the virgin birth is found, with one exception, in his first *Apology* and in the *Dialogue with Trypho*. The genuineness of these works is practically beyond doubt; and the fragment on the Resurrection, from which the only other reference is taken, cannot, I think, be proved spurious. It has seemed best to deal with this rather voluminous material under five heads: (1) we shall consider those passages which state the fact of the virgin birth, and inseparably connected with these we shall find certain phrases or clauses expressing the purpose of this kind of birth; (2) we shall notice the problems with which Trypho the Jew confronts such a theory; (3) the use of Greek theology or mythology; (4) Justin's appeal to and use of prophecy; (5) we shall note some concessions granted by this eminent champion of the Christian faith.

<sup>28</sup> See *Texts and Studies*, Vol. I, No. 1.

<sup>29</sup> EUSEBIUS, *Church History*, Books IV, VIII, XII, XVI-XVIII.

1. The passages which make the simple statement that he was born of a virgin by the power of God are: *Apology*, I, 32 (I, 174), 46 (I, 178); *Dialogue*, 23 (I, 206), 105 (I, 251), 113 (I, 255), and 127 (I, 263). Those which add some expression as to the purpose of the virgin birth are: *Apol.*, I, 63 (I, 184), "for the salvation of those who believe on him;" *Dial.*, 45 (I, 217), to destroy the "serpent" and his angels, to disdain death, and to finally do away with it; and *Dial.*, 100 (I, 249), containing an explanation of the term "Son of man," because of Jesus' birth by Mary or his descent from Adam through Mary; also a statement of the purpose as follows:

He became man by the Virgin in order that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might receive its destruction in the same manner in which it derived its origin. For Eve, who was a virgin, and undefiled, having conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the virgin Mary received faith and joy when the angel Gabriel announced the good tidings to her that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon her and the power of the Highest would overshadow her; wherefore the holy thing begotten of her is the Son of God; and she replied, Be it unto me according to thy word. And by her has he been born to whom we have proved so many scriptures refer, and by whom God destroys both the serpent and those angels and men who are like him; but works deliverance from death to those who repent of their wickedness and believe upon him.<sup>30</sup>

This antithesis of the work of Mary to that of Eve is met with here for the first time. It is a favorite theme with the Fathers, however, and will reappear frequently in more elaborate form.<sup>31</sup>

2. The problems raised by Trypho are twofold: (1) the distinctively Jewish difficulty of how there can be another god besides the maker of all things, chap. 50 (I, 220), and (2) the difficulty of showing that this

<sup>30</sup>JUSTIN MARTYR, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*, C: Καὶ διὰ τῆς Παρθένου ἄνθρωπος γεγενῆσθαι, ἵνα καὶ δι' ἧς ὁδοῦ ἡ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄφως παρακοὴ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔλαβε, καὶ διὰ ταύτης τῆς ὁδοῦ καὶ κατὰ λυσιν λάβῃ. Παρθένος γὰρ οὖσα Εἷσα καὶ ἀφθόρος, τὸν λόγον τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄφως συλλαβοῦσα, παρακοὴν καὶ θάνατον ἔτεκε. Πίστιν δὲ καὶ χαρὰν λαβοῦσα Μαρία ἡ Παρθένος, εὐαγγελιζομένου αὐτῇ Γαβριὴλ ἀγγέλου, ὅτι Πνεῦμα Κυρίου ἐπ' αὐτὴν ἐπελεύσεται, καὶ δύναμις Ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει αὐτήν. διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἐξ αὐτῆς ἁγίον ἐστίν· Τίς τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀπεκρίνατο. "Γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου." Καὶ διὰ ταύτης γεγενῆσθαι οὗτος, περὶ οὗ τὰς τοσαύτας Γραφὰς ἀπεδείξαμεν εἰρῆσθαι, δι' οὗ ὁ θεὸς τὸν τε ὄφιν καὶ τοὺς ὁμοιωθέντας ἀγγέλους καὶ ἀνθρώπους καταλύει. Ἀπαλλαγὴν δὲ τοῦ θανάτου τοῖς μεταγινώσκουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν φαύλων καὶ πιστεύουσιν εἰς αὐτὸν ἐργάζεται.

<sup>31</sup>There is a spurious passage, "Resurrection," 3 (I, 295), which states from the ascetic standpoint the purpose of Christ's peculiar birth: "And our Lord Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, for no other reason than that he might destroy the begetting by lawless desire, and might show to the rulers that the formation of man was possible to God without human intervention."



second pre-existent God submitted to be born of a virgin, chaps. 50, 63 (I, 228), and chap. 68 (I, 252). The Jews expected that when their Christ came he would be "man born of men." In answer to these two objections, Justin makes an appeal to the prophecy purporting to relate to John the Baptist and the two advents of Christ; and, to establish his pre-existence and divinity, makes use of the account of how God (who was not God the Father) appeared to Moses and other Hebrew patriarchs, and of how the plural of the deity is used in the account of creation. Trypho is, according to Justin's account, convinced on the first point more easily than a modern reader would be, but on the second he maintains his ground in spite of the apologist's use of Isa. 53:8; Ps. 110:3, 4; and the Immanuel passage, Isa. 7:10-17. He prefers to think with the Ebionites of a thoroughly human Jesus, who, if Christ at all, was made so by the descent of the Spirit of God upon him.

3. The passages which make use of the argument from Greek mythology fall into two classes: (1) those which favor the virgin birth on the basis of the Greek parallels; and (2) those which emphasize the distinction between the Christian story and those of the Greeks, showing to advantage the chaste and exalted nature of the former. Passages of the first sort are *Apol.*, I, 21 and 22 (I, 170):

And when we say that the Word who is the first-birth (first-born) of God was produced without sexual union . . . we propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteemed sons of Jupiter. For you know how many sons your esteemed writers ascribe to Jupiter.<sup>32</sup> And if we assert that the Word of God was born of God in a peculiar manner, different from ordinary generation, let this, as said above, be no extraordinary thing to you, who say that Mercury is the angelic word of God. . . . And if we affirm that he was born of a virgin, accept this in common with what you accept of Perseus.

But it should be noted that in chap. 67 Trypho maintains that Justin should be ashamed of propounding a story similar to that of the mythology regarding Perseus. So that the parallel to Greek mythology is in Trypho's estimation a further condemnation of the virgin-birth story. A little farther on, *Dial.*, chap. 70 (I, 234), Justin makes a very ingenious turn of the mythological argument, asserting that these Greek stories were concocted by Satan, the simulator, on the basis of the prophecies that foretold the virgin birth. *E. g.*: "And

<sup>32</sup> I, 21: Τῷ δὲ καὶ τὸν Λόγον, ὃ ἐστὶ πρῶτον γέννημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀνεῖ ἐπιμιξίας φάσκειν ἡμῶς γεγενῆσθαι. . . . οὐ παρὰ τοὺς παρ' ὑμῶν λεγομένους υἱοὺς τῷ Διὶ καὶνόν τι φέρομεν. Πόσους γὰρ υἱοὺς φάσκουσιν τοῦ Διὸς οἱ παρ' ὑμῶν τιμώμενοι συγγραφεῖς ἐπίστασθε.



when I hear, Trypho, said I, that Perseus was begotten of a virgin, I understand that the deceiving serpent counterfeited also this."<sup>33</sup> The outstanding passage which differentiates the Christian from the heathen stories is *Apol.*, I, 33 (I, 174):

But lest some, not understanding the prophecy now cited, should charge us with the very things we have been laying to the charge of the poets, who say that Jupiter went in to women through lust, let us try to explain the words. This, then, "Behold a virgin shall conceive," signifies that a virgin should conceive without intercourse; for if she had had intercourse with anyone whatever, she was no longer a virgin; but the Power of God having come upon the virgin, overshadowed her, and caused her while yet a virgin to conceive. And the angel of God who was sent to this same virgin at the same time brought her good news, saying, "Behold, etc. . . ." It is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and the Power of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of God, as the aforesaid prophet Moses declared; and it was this which, when it came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, caused her to conceive, not by intercourse, but by power.<sup>34</sup>

Certainly this passage makes for a high appreciation of Justin's insight and discretion. He draws from Luke and interprets him correctly, rigidly excluding any idea of intercourse. He repudiates Greek mythology as being in any way his own explanation of the virgin birth, although he has used it as an *argumentum ad hominem* to silence the inconsistent carplings of his gentile opponents. Moreover, the Spirit, the Power, the Word, and the Son of God are for him synonymous terms, and upon this basis he attempts an ingenious harmony of John and Luke. Justin's repudiation of the Greek mythological explanation is one of the most creditable elements in his apology touching the virgin birth. Whether the Christian conception be right or not, Justin has, in so far as he represents the early second-century thought, freed it from the grossness of similar heathen stories, and has

<sup>33</sup> *Dial.*: Όταν δὲ, ὦ Τρύφων, ἔφην, ἐκ παρθένου γεγενῆσθαι τὸν Περσέα ἀκούσω, καὶ τοῦτο μμήσασθαι τὸν πλάνον ὄφιν συνίημι.

<sup>34</sup> "Ὅπως δὲ μὴ τινες μὴ νοήσαντες τὴν δεδηλωμένην προφητείαν, ἐγκαλέσωσιν ἡμῶν ἅπερ ἐνεκάλεσαμεν τοῖς ποιηταῖς εἰποῦσιν ἀφροδισίων χάριν ἐληλυθέναι ἐπὶ γυναῖκα τὸν Δία, διασαφῆσαι τοὺς λόγους πειρασώμεθα. Τὸ οὖν, 'Ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει, σημαίνει οὐ συνουσιασθεῖσαν τὴν παρθένον συλλαβεῖν. Εἰ γὰρ ἐσυνουσιάσθη ὑπὸ ὁτιοῦν, οὐκ ἔτι ἦν παρθένος. ἀλλὰ δύναμις θεοῦ ἐπελθοῦσα τῇ παρθένῳ ἐπεσκέασεν αὐτήν, καὶ κνοφορήσαι παρθένον οὖσαν πεποίηκε. Καὶ ὁ ἀποσταλεὶς δὲ πρὸς αὐτήν τὴν παρθένον κατ' ἐκεῖνο τοῦ καιροῦ ἀγγελος θεοῦ, εὐηγγελίσατο αὐτήν εἰπών· 'Ἰδοὺ . . . Τὸ Πνεῦμα οὖν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τὴν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐδὲν ἄλλο νοῆσαι θέμις, ἢ τὸν Λόγον, ὃς καὶ πρωτότοκος τῷ θεῷ ἐστὶ, ὡς Μωϋσῆς ὁ προδεδηλωμένος προφήτης ἐμήνυσε. Καὶ τοῦτο ἐλθὼν ἐπὶ τὴν παρθένον καὶ ἐπισκιάσαν οὐ διὰ συνουσίας, ἀλλὰ διὰ δυνάμεως ἐγκύμονα κατέστησε.

preserved in his own more explicit language much of the chaste quality of the gospel narratives themselves. No part of his apology is more sane than this, unless, indeed, it be the concessions which, for the practical purpose of winning Trypho and men of his kind, he is willing to make.

4. Justin makes a large and questionable use of prophecy. As would be expected, the chief appeal is to the Immanuel passage in Isa., chap. 7, but there is also a reference to "Who shall declare his generation" (Isa., chap. 53), and a peculiar use of Gen. 49:11: "He hath washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes."

In *Apol.*, I, 33 (I, 174), Justin asserts that the prophecy (prediction) was made in order to strengthen the faith of those who should see its fulfilment, and insists that the term "virgin" (*παρθένος*) precludes the possibility of intercourse in the generation of the child referred to. In *Dial.*, chaps. 42 (I, 216), 66 (I, 231), 71 (I, 234), and 84 (I, 241), he recognizes and denies the Jewish contention that the prophecy refers to Hezekiah and that the term (LXX: ἡ παρθένος) used in the prophecy means simply a young woman. He takes up the more constructive part of his argument in chaps. 77 and 78 (I, 237, 238). By a somewhat minute and decidedly parabolic interpretation, he attempts to show that the prophecy refers to Christ rather than to Hezekiah. This predictive scripture called Herod king of Assyria because of his 'ungodly character. Christ, before he was old enough to call father or mother, received the power of Damascus through the magi who came with their gifts from Arabia; while Samaria represents the power of the demon, to whom prior to the birth of Christ the magi were in bondage. Thus in the birth of Christ alone the other specific predictions of the prophecy are notably fulfilled, and therefore strengthen the argument for the foretold virgin birth. It is pointed out, further, in *Dial.*, chap. 84 (I, 241), that it would have been no *sign* at all if the child referred to had been born by ordinary generation, and that the peculiar manner of birth is in keeping with the creative function of the Word of God, who made Eve from Adam's rib, and in the beginning created all living beings apart from parentage.

Leaving the Immanuel passage, we may get further light as to Justin's use of Scripture from the following quotations. *Dial.*, chap. 54 (I, 222):

That the Scripture mentions the blood of the grape (Gen. 49:11) has been evidently designed because Christ derives blood, not from the seed of



man, but from the power of God. For as God, and not man, has produced the blood of the vine, so also (the Scripture) has predicted that the blood of Christ would be, not of the seed of man, but of the power of God. But this prophecy, sirs, which I repeat, proves that Christ is not man of men, begotten in the ordinary course of humanity.<sup>35</sup>

The passage then which Isaiah records, "Who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth," does it not appear to you to refer to one who, not having descent from man, was said to be delivered over to death by God, for the transgressions of the people? Of whose blood, Moses, when speaking in parable, said that he would wash his garments in the blood of the grape; since his blood did not spring from the seed of man, but from the will of God. And then what is said by David (Ps. 110:3): In the splendors of thy holiness have I begotten thee from the womb, before the morning star. The Lord hath sworn and will not repent. Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. Does this not declare to you that (he was) from of old, and that the God and Father of all things intended him to be begotten by a human womb? <sup>36</sup>

Perhaps no comment need be made upon Justin's use of Scripture. It is very evident that the New Testament narratives had not in his time obtained for themselves the standing of the Old Testament writings; therefore he felt the necessity of basing his *Apology* upon the ancient, authoritative, and "inspired" Scripture. The violence of his interpretation was not violence in those days, but rather ingenuity, ability, and "spiritual," rather than historical, insight. The final impression left upon the mind of the reader, however, is that of respect for the interpretative method of Trypho and the Jewish school, and of regret that the great Greek apologist for the Christian faith should be so far afield from a just and historical interpretation of the Old Testament.

<sup>35</sup> *Dial.*: Τὸ δὲ αἷμα τῆς σταφυλῆς εἰπεῖν τὸν λόγον, διὰ τῆς τέχνης δεδήλωκεν, ὅτι αἷμα μὲν ἔχει ὁ Χριστὸς οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπου σπέρματος, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεως. \*Ὁν γὰρ τρόπον τὸ τῆς ἀμπέλου αἷμα οὐκ ἀνθρώπος ἐγέννησεν, ἀλλὰ θεὸς, οὕτως καὶ τὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αἷμα οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρωπείου γένους ἔσσεσθαι, ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ δυνάμεως, προεμήνυσεν. Ἡ δὲ προφητεία αὕτη, ὦ ἄνδρες, ἣν ἔλεγον, ἀποδεικνύει ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστὸς ἀνθρώπος ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, κατὰ τὸ κοινὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων γεννηθεὶς.

<sup>36</sup> *Dialogue*, chap. 63 (I, 228, 229): "Τὴν γενεὰν αὐτοῦ τίς διηγῆσεται; ὅτι αἱρεται ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἡ ζωὴ αὐτοῦ," οὐ δοκεῖ σοι λελέχθαι ὡς οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἔχοντος τὸ γένος τοῦ διὰ τὰς ἀνομίας τοῦ λαοῦ εἰς θάνατον παραδεδοῦσθαι εἰρημένου ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ; περὶ οὗ καὶ Μωσῆς τοῦ αἵματος, ὡς προέφην, αἵματι σταφυλῆς, ἐν παραβολῇ εἰπὼν, τὴν στολὴν αὐτοῦ πλύνειν ἔφη, ὡς τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρωπείου σπέρματος γεγεννημένου, ἀλλ' ἐκ θελήματος θεοῦ. Καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ Δαβὶδ εἰρημένα. "Ἐν ταῖς λαμπρότησι τῶν ἁγίων σου ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐγέννησά σε. Ὡμοσε Κύριος καὶ οὐ μεταμέλη θήσεται. σὺ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισεδέκ," οὐ σημαίνει ὑμῖν ὅτι ἀνωθεν, καὶ διὰ γαστρὸς ἀνθρωπείας ὁ θεὸς καὶ Πατὴρ τῶν ὄλων γεννᾶσθαι αὐτὸν ἐμελλε.



5. But it is not as if the scriptural argument were the whole of Justin's *Apology*, and represented the sum total of his thought regarding the virgin birth. As has been already indicated, he shows himself perhaps wiser in his concessions than in his assertions. It is true that these concessions are demanded by Trypho, chaps. 67 (I, 231) and 49 (I, 219), who tries to put Justin to shame for upholding a story similar to that of the birth of Perseus from Danae:

And you ought to feel ashamed when you make assertions similar to theirs, and rather should say that this Jesus was born man of men. And if you prove from the Scriptures that he is the Christ, and that on account of having led a life conformed to the law and perfect, he deserved the honor of being elected to be Christ, (it is well); but do not venture to tell monstrous phenomena, lest you be convicted of talking foolishly like the Greeks.<sup>37</sup>

It was probably in reply to such demands as this that Justin found it possible to separate the question of the divinity of Christ from that of the manner of his birth, and to fall back upon the character and ability of Jesus as a more tenable apologetic ground than that of his peculiar generation. *Apol.*, I, 22 (I, 170):

Moreover, the Son of God, called Jesus, even if only a man by ordinary [generation], yet on account of his wisdom is worthy to be called the Son of God; for all writers call God the Father of men and gods.<sup>38</sup>

In chap. 48 (I, 219) there is another very remarkable passage of concession, and one which indicates that in Justin's time there were Christians who, if his judgment was at all representative, were in good standing among their brethren, while denying the miraculous and asserting the full natural birth of Christ:

Now assuredly, Trypho, I continued, that this man is the Christ of God does not fail, though I be unable to prove that he existed formerly as Son of the Maker of all things, being God, and was born man by the virgin. But since I have certainly proved that this man is the Christ of God, whoever he be, even if I do not prove that he pre-existed, and submitted to be born a man of like passions with us, having a body according to the Father's will; in this last matter alone it is just to say that I have erred, and not to deny that he is the Christ, though it should appear that he was born man of man,

<sup>37</sup> 67: Καὶ ὑμεῖς τὰ αὐτὰ ἐκείνοις λέγοντες, αἰδεῖσθαι ὀφείλετε, καὶ μάλλον ἀνθρώπων ἐξ ἀνθρώπων γενόμενον λέγειν τὸν Ἰησοῦν τοῦτον. καὶ ἐὰν ἀποδείκνυτε ἀπὸ τῶν Γραφῶν, ὅτι αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστός, διὰ τὸ ἐννόμως καὶ τελῶς πολιτεύεσθαι αὐτὸν, κατηξιῶσθαι τοῦ ἐκλεγῆναι εἰς Χριστόν. ἀλλὰ μὴ τερατολογεῖν τολμᾶτε, ὅπως μήτε ὁμοίως τοῖς Ἑλλήσι μωραίνειν ἐλέγχῃσθε.

<sup>38</sup> 22: Τίς δὲ θεοῦ ὁ Ἰησοῦς λεγόμενος, εἰ καὶ κοινῶς μόνον ἄνθρωπος, διὰ σοφίαν ἄξιος υἱὸς θεοῦ λέγεσθαι. πατέρα γὰρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε πάντες συγγραφεῖς τὸν θεὸν καλοῦσιν.

and it is proved that he became Christ by election. For there are some, my friends, I said, of our race, who admit that he is Christ, while holding him to be man of men ; with whom I do not agree, nor would I, even though most of those who have the same opinions as myself should say so ; since we were enjoined by Christ himself to put no faith in human doctrines, but those proclaimed by the blessed prophets and taught by himself.<sup>39</sup>

To summarize the teaching of Justin Martyr very briefly, we would say that he looked upon the virgin birth of the pre-existent Word as an important factor in securing the salvation of believers and the destruction of Satan, disobedience, and death. Justin was acquainted with the Logos doctrine of the fourth gospel, but was confused in his thought concerning the Spirit, the Power, and the Word, all of which were to him terms for the first-born of God, *Apol.*, I, 33 (I, 174) ; his idea is distinctly that of an incarnation. He regarded Mary's function for the race as in some sense the antithesis of that of the disobedient Eve. The Old Testament narrative proved the pre-existence of Christ, the Word, and clearly predicted his peculiar birth. Those who accepted Greek mythology had no right to hesitate at the Christian story of the virgin birth, since Satan foresaw this story in prophecy and counterfeited it in the Greek mythology, and since the Christian story is free from all the grossness of the Greek myths. But, after all, the belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, may be established by appeal to his ability, character, and his consequent election by God, as some Christians maintain, rather than upon his miraculous birth ; although Justin is by no means willing to accept this opinion for himself.

1. Justin (*Dial.*, chap. 78) is the first to give evidence of the presence and use of an extra-canonical source. The mention of the birth of Jesus in a *cave* near Bethlehem indicates Justin's knowledge of some such material as is contained in the protevangelium of

<sup>39</sup> "Ἦδη μέντοι, ὦ Τρύφων, εἶπον, οὐκ ἀπὸλλυται τὸ τοιοῦτον εἶναι Χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰ μὴ ἀποδείξαι μὴ δύνωμαι ὅτι καὶ προὔπηρχεν Τίς τοῦ Ποιητοῦ τῶν ὄλων, θεὸς ὢν, καὶ γεγέννηται ἄνθρωπος διὰ τῆς Παρθένου. Ἀλλὰ ἐκ παντὸς ἀποδεικνυμένου, ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὅστις οὗτος ἐστίν, εἰ μὴ ἀποδεικνύω ὅτι προὔπηρχε, καὶ γεννηθῆναι ἄνθρωπος ὁμοιοπαθὴς ἡμῖν, σάρκα ἔχων, κατὰ τὴν τοῦ Πατρὸς βουλὴν ὑπέμεινεν, ἐν τούτῳ πεπλανῆσθαι με μόνον λέγειν δίκαιον, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀρνεῖσθαι ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ Χριστὸς, εἰ μὴ φαίνεται ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἀνθρώπων γεννηθεὶς, καὶ ἐκλογῇ γενόμενος εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν εἶναι ἀποδεικνύηται. Καὶ γὰρ εἰσὶ τινες, ὦ φίλοι, ἔλεγον, ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡμετέρου γένους ὁμολογοῦντες αὐτὸν Χριστὸν εἶναι, ἄνθρωπον δὲ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων γενόμενον ἀποφαινόμενοι. οἷς οὐ συντίθεται, οὐδ' ἂν πλείστοι ταῦτά μοι δοξάσαντες εἴποιεν. ἐπειδὴ οὐκ ἀνθρωπείους διδάγμασι κεκελεύσμεθα ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ πείθεσθαι, ἀλλὰ τοῖς διὰ τῶν μακαρίων προφητῶν κηρυχθεῖσι καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ διδασχθεῖσι.



James.<sup>40</sup> But the remarkable fact is that, if such a gospel were in existence and known to Justin, it should have failed to influence his view of the virgin birth and should have supplanted or colored in so small a degree his reflection of the canonical infancy stories. His use of the canonical stories is clearly evidenced in such passages as *Apol.*, I, 33 (I, 174); *Dial.*, chaps. 78 (I, 237, 238) and 100 (I, 249);<sup>41</sup> while *Apol.*, I, 30, indicates that he had a knowledge of both Matthew and Luke. That he was acquainted with some extra-canonical source is to be granted, but, at the same time, the absence of any real or significant influence of such a source is of considerable importance.

2. Justin's idea of the virgin birth is that of the incarnation (by such a process as is described in Luke) of the Son of God, who was indeed God and who with the Father constituted a sort of ditheism<sup>42</sup> in the heavenly world prior to incarnation.

3. From the foregoing it will be seen that Justin's contribution is in the direction of a schematic understanding of the virgin birth, and that his attempt is harmonistic, not only in the matter of combining, as far as possible, the Johannine and the Lucan representations, as a whole, but in identifying the "Spirit" and "Power" in Luke with the "Word" in John, and all of these with the "Son of God," whom he considers to be none other than God. His view is decidedly that of an incarnation; and in this he agrees with Aristides, but goes beyond him in the attempt to harmonize the facts with this view.

IV. TATIAN (about 110-72 A. D.). Tatian's writings have very largely perished, possibly because of the church's disapproval of his teaching. In his address to the Greeks, chap. 21 (II, 74), we have the nearest approach to a theory of the virgin birth:

We do not act as fools, O Greeks, nor utter idle tales, when we announce

<sup>40</sup> The statement in the same passage that the magi came from *Arabia* seems to embody a tradition more specific than the story of Matthew, or it may be Justin's interpretation of "from the East." The extant apocryphal gospels make no mention of such a fact.

<sup>41</sup> CONRADY, *Quelle der Kindheitsgesch. Jesu*, pp. 126 ff., endeavors to magnify Justin's use of extra-canonical sources, especially his use of the gospel of James, and upon the basis of *Apol.*, I, 33, *ὡς οἱ ἀπομνημονεύσαντες πάντα τὰ περὶ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐδίδαξαν*, concludes that, according to his own words, Justin used more than one gospel of the childhood.

<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, Justin's unequivocal statement of Jewish monotheism is seen in *Dial.*, chaps. 11, 114, 127; also in *Apol.*, I, 12, 61, and *Apol.*, II, 6.



that God was born in the form of a man. I call on you who reproach us to compare your mythical accounts with our narration.<sup>43</sup>

Although this is not exactly to the point, it seems to be an echo of the familiar argument of his teacher Justin. The genealogical tables are omitted<sup>44</sup> from his *Diatessaron* (IX, 44, 45), but the account of the virgin birth is faithfully reproduced from Matthew and Luke.

Thus, while the evidence from Tatian is very meager, it is perhaps sufficient to warrant the conclusion that, at the time of his writing the address to the Greeks, and also at the time of the compilation of his harmony, he was in accord with the narratives in the infancy sections of the gospels, and probably shared largely in the apologetic position of Justin Martyr.

V. MELITO (bishop of Sardis, 160-77 A. D.) has four brief references to the virgin birth that are preserved to us. These assert the pre-existence of Jesus without bodily form, and that, though he was "arrayed in the nature of his Father," he was carried in the womb of the virgin and assumed a bodily form from her. *Discourse on the Cross*, chap. 3 (VIII, 756), *on Faith*, chaps. 4 and 5 (VIII, 757). The reference in the *Discourse on Faith*, chap. 4, is a striking example of the attempted harmony of the Johannine prologue with a combination of the infancy stories of Matthew and Luke. No extra-canonical influence is discernible, and the contribution of Melito is without particular significance.

VI. IRENÆUS (about 120-202 A. D.). With Irenæus we pass from the field of apologetics to that of polemics. Justin Martyr was able to get along on friendly terms with his fellow-Christians who believed in the natural generation of Jesus. This may have been due to the tolerant spirit of Justin, or to one or both of two other facts, viz., the comparative unimportance of the doctrine of the virgin birth in the church at large, and, what is quite probable, the comparative moderation of those who took occasion to deviate in some respect from the established belief. But in the time of Irenæus the doctrine had become so rigid and was thought to be freighted with so weighty theological consequences, and, moreover, its various classes of opponents had become so strong and so odious to the orthodox majority, that the

<sup>43</sup> TATIAN, *Oratio adv. Graecos*, 21: Οὐ γὰρ μωραίνομεν, ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες, οὐ δὲ ληροῦς ἀπαγγέλλομεν, Θεὸν ἐν ἀνθρώπου μορφῇ γεγονέναι καταγγέλλοντες. Οἱ λοιδοροῦντες ἡμᾶς συγκρίνατε τοὺς μύθους ὑμῶν τοῖς ἡμετέροις διηγήμασι.

<sup>44</sup> This to disprove the descent of Jesus from David. See THEODORET, *Haeret Fab.*, I, 20.

defender of Christianity was forced to direct his energies against them rather than against the outside world.<sup>45</sup>

This Irenæus did with no sparing hand, and so diligent was he in meeting the Gnostics at every turn in their mystic and extravagant vagaries, so persistent in his appeal to the law, the prophets, and the New Testament writings, and so conscientious in emphasizing the vital deductions which he thought to rest upon the doctrine of the virgin birth, that we are indebted to him for both a large amount of material on the question and almost proportionate light.

From an inductive study this material finally falls into a threefold division, which, with the ordinary exceptions due to such a method, will best serve to present the status of the doctrine in the time of Irenæus. We shall endeavor to give, first, a statement of the various views held, including, as far as we are able to interpret it, that of the Gnostics. In the second division Irenæus's appeal to Scripture will be presented; and in the third, the more distinctively theological argument and deductions.

1. The doctrine is stated or denied in a great variety of forms, the most difficult being that of the Gnostics produced in their attempt to keep Christ utterly free from the pollution of inherently evil flesh, and also to keep God the Father from dealing directly with that which was human and therefore sinful. In *Against Heresies*, I, 7, § 2 (I, 325)<sup>46</sup> it is stated that the Christ was produced by the Demiurge from a psychic (*ψυχικόν*) nature, and that this Christ passed through Mary as water through a tube. Thus he was made in heaven of wholly supra-earthly substance, and suffered no pollution or alteration in his earthly advent. The continual aim of the Gnostics is thoroughly to denaturalize the conception, birth, and appearance of Jesus, in order to preserve the divinely created Christ from material contamination. In *Against Heresies*, III, 22, 2 (I, 454), Irenæus meets this theory in the following words:

Superfluous, too, in that case, is his descent into Mary; for why did he come down into her if he were to take nothing of her? Still further, if he had taken nothing of Mary, he would never have availed himself of those kinds of food which are derived from the earth by which that body which has been taken from the earth is nourished.<sup>47</sup>

A rather elaborate statement of the mediaries used by God in the formation and earthly birth of Christ is given in I, 15, 3 (I, 339):

<sup>45</sup> EUSEBIUS, *Church History*, Books V, XX, XXVI.

<sup>46</sup> The citations in this section, unless otherwise designated, are from this work.

<sup>47</sup> Ἐπεὶ περισσὴ καὶ ἡ εἰς τὴν Μαρίαν αὐτοῦ καθόδος. τί γὰρ καὶ εἰς αὐτὴν κατήκει, εἰ μὴδὲν ἔμελλε λήψεσθαι παρ' αὐτῆς; Ἐτι τε εἰ μὴδὲν εἰλήφει παρὰ τῆς Μαρίας, οὐκ αὐτὰς ἀπὸ γῆς εἰλημμένας προσέτερο τροφὰς, δι' ὧν τὸ ἀπὸ γῆς ληφθὲν τρέφεται σῶμα.



The angel Gabriel took the place of Logos, the Holy Spirit that of Zoe, the Power of the Highest that of Anthropos, while the Virgin pointed out the place of Ecclesia. And thus by a dispensation there was generated by Him through Mary that man whom, as he passed through the womb, the Father of all chose to obtain the knowledge of Himself by means of the Word.<sup>48</sup>

Here, as in many of the Gnostic utterances, it is difficult to discover any clear and consistent conception running through the passage. This is due to the studied coining of terms and juggling with the same for the purpose of making the Christian system more of an awe-inspiring mystery, known only to the initiated. From the context, however, it seems that these æons of the tetrad, viz., ἄνθρωπος, ἐκκλησία, λόγος, and ζωή, produced the pre-existent Christ; and in order to have an exact parallel in God's generation of Jesus through Mary, these agencies have fitting substitutes which carry out the divine will, viz., Gabriel for λόγος, the Holy Spirit for ζωή, the Power of the Highest for ἄνθρωπος, and the virgin Mary for ἐκκλησία. There is in this scheme of substitution some show of reason. Gabriel does with some fitness fill the place of the Word or messenger of God; the Holy Spirit, the place of the imparted divine life; the Power of the Highest, the place of the natural generating agency, man; and Mary, the place of the medium, the church, through which God comes among men. The scheme is inconsistent where it introduces the Word as imparting to Jesus in his passage through the womb the knowledge of the Father.

In I, 25, 1, Carpocrates<sup>49</sup> and his followers "hold that Jesus was the son of Joseph and was just like other men, with the exception that he differed from them in this respect, that, inasmuch as his soul was steadfast and pure, he perfectly remembered those things which he had witnessed within the sphere of the unbegotten God."<sup>50</sup> Here one cannot escape the inference that Carpocrates and his followers believed in the pre-existence of the souls of all men.

Further statements are found in four or five other passages which it is necessary to incorporate in this section :

<sup>48</sup> Καὶ τοῦ μὲν λόγου ἀναπεπληρωκέναι τὸν τόπον τὸν ἀγγελὸν Γαβριὴλ, τῆς δὲ Ζωῆς τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, τοῦ δὲ ἀνθρώπου τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ ὑψίστου, τὸν δὲ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τόπον ἢ παρθένος. οὕτως τε ὁ κατ' οἰκονομίαν διὰ τῆς Μαρίας γενεσιουργεῖται παρ' αὐτῷ ἄνθρωπος ὃν ὁ πατὴρ τῶν ὅλων διελθόντα διὰ μήτρας ἐξελέξατο διὰ λόγου εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν αὐτοῦ.

<sup>49</sup> EUSEBIUS, *Church History*, Books IV, VII.

<sup>50</sup> See John 17: 3. IRENÆUS, *Contra Haereses*, I, 25, 1: "(Dicunt) Jesum autem e Joseph natum, et cum similis reliquis hominibus fuerit, distasse a reliquis secundum id, quod anima eius firma et munda cum esset. Commemorata fuerit quae visa essent sibi in ea circumlacione quae fuisset ingenito Deo."



I, 26, 1 (I, 352): "He [Cerinthus<sup>51</sup>] represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men."<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: "Those who are called Ebionites agree that the world was made by God; but their opinions with respect to the Lord are similar to those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates."<sup>53</sup> I, 27, 1 (I, 352): "Cerdo . . . taught that the God proclaimed by the law and the prophets was not the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the former was known, but the latter unknown; while the one also was righteous, but the other benevolent."<sup>54</sup> IV, 16, 1 (I, 440): "The Valentinians<sup>55</sup> again maintain that the dispensational Jesus was the same who passed through Mary, upon whom the Savior from the more exalted region descended."<sup>56</sup> V, 19, 2 (I, 547): "Others still despise the advent of the Lord manifest [to the senses], for they do not admit his incarnation; while others, ignoring the arrangement that he should be born of a virgin, maintain that he was begotten by Joseph."<sup>57</sup>

The standard summary of heresies is to be found in I, 22, 31 (I, 347-58), where, beginning with Simon of Samaria, who held that God appeared among the Jews as Son, to the Samaritans as Father, and to other nations as the Holy Spirit, he passes on to mention nearly every phase of what he calls the "Lernæan hydra that was generated from the school of Valentinus." Saturninus of Antioch in Syria held that the Savior was without birth, body, or form, and was only by supposition a visible man. Basilides thought that Nous (νοῦς) was the first-born of the unborn Father. Νοῦς is called Christ, and from him was born Λόγος. Christ appeared upon earth, wrought miracles, transformed himself as he pleased, was not in any way humiliated, defiled, or cruci-

<sup>51</sup> EUSEBIUS, *C. H.*, Books III, XXVIII.

<sup>52</sup> "Jesum autem subjecit non ex Virgine natum (impossibile enim hoc ei visum est); fuisse autem Joseph et Mariae filium similiter ut reliqui omnes homines, et plus potuisse justitia et prudentia et sapientia ab hominibus."

<sup>53</sup> "Qui autem dicuntur Ebionaei consentiunt quidem mundum a Deo factum: ea autem, quae sunt erga Dominum, non similiter ut Cerinthus et Carpocrates opinantur."

<sup>54</sup> Κέρδων . . . ἐδίδαξε τὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ προφητῶν κεκηρυγμένον θεόν, μὴ εἶναι πατέρα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τὸν μὲν γὰρ γνωρίζεσθαι τὸν δὲ ἀγνώστα εἶναι, καὶ τὸν μὲν δίκαιον τὸν δὲ ἀγαθὸν ὑπάρχειν.

<sup>55</sup> EUSEBIUS, *C. H.*, Books IV, X, XI.

<sup>56</sup> "Qui autem a Valentino sunt, Jesum quidem, qui sit ex dispositione, ipsum esse, qui per Mariam transierit in quem illum de superiori Salvatore descendisse; quem et Christum dici."

<sup>57</sup> "Alii autem manifestum adventum Domini contemnunt, incarnationem eius non recipientes; alii autem rursus ignorantes Virginis dispensationem ex Joseph dicunt eum generatum."

fied. Carpocrates believed Jesus to be the son of Joseph and Mary as above stated ; and many of the followers of Basilides and Carpocrates, owing to their negation of the worth and salvability of the body and their belief in salvation and resurrection for the soul only, became degraded into licentiousness and promiscuity. Cerinthus and the Ebionites<sup>58</sup> agreed with Carpocrates as to the birth of Jesus. Cerdo emphasized the fact that the father of Jesus Christ was the unknown God and not he of the law and prophets. Marcion accepted only the gospel of Luke, expunging therefrom the account of the generation of Jesus and other material offensive to the Gnostic taste. He treated the epistles of Paul and prophecy in the same manner. The Encratites were a product of the teaching of Saturninus and Marcion, but represented the extremely opposite result of that teaching which, springing from the same or a similar source, culminated in licentiousness ; for the Encratites, holding to the inherent evil of flesh and of human generation, practiced the most rigorous abstinence. Of this class was Tatian after the death of Justin Martyr. The Barbeliotes held that Barbelos, the eternal æon who existed as a virgin spirit, created light and, anointing it, thus constituted the Christ. The Ophites and Sethians, while believing that Jesus was begotten of a virgin through the agency of God, and was therefore wiser, purer, and more righteous than all other men, held at the same time that Jesus was only constituted Christ by the descent of Christ united to Sophia (σοφία) into him.

A more condensed summary of the various beliefs touching the birth is found in III, 11, 3 (I, 427):

Some, however, make the assertion that this dispensational Jesus did become incarnate and suffered, whom they represent as having passed through Mary just as water through a tube ; but others allege him to be the son of the Demiurge, upon whom the dispensational Jesus descended ; while others again say that Jesus was born from Joseph and Mary and that the Christ from above descended upon him, being without flesh and impassible. But according to the opinion of no one of the heretics was the Word of God made flesh. For if anyone carefully examines the systems of them all, he will find that the Word of God is brought in by them all as not having become incarnate (*sine carne*) and impassible, as is also the Christ from above. Others consider him to have been manifested as a transfigured man, but they maintain him to have been neither born nor to have become incarnate ; whilst others hold that he did not assume human form at all, but that as a dove he did descend upon that Jesus who was born of Mary. Therefore the Lord's

<sup>58</sup> It may be that the Ebionites denied the virgin birth of Jesus in order to maintain his Davidic descent as Messiah.



disciple, pointing them all out as false witnesses, says, And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.<sup>59</sup>

In this passage five tolerably distinct views are set forth: (1) That Jesus, the pre-existent one, took a real body and became subject to suffering, but that his body was in no respect derived from Mary. This was the view of Valentinus and was elaborated by Apelles, Ptolemy, Secundus, and Heracleon. (2) That Jesus was the son of the Demiurge and that upon him descended the dispensational Jesus. (3) That Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary, and that Christ, spiritual and incapable of suffering, descended upon him as a dove at baptism. This view is twice stated, the second statement being in the sentence before the last of the reference. It was the view of Carpocrates, Cerinthus, the Ebionites, and others. (4) That Jesus was manifested as a transfigured man, that he was a semblance only, without flesh and not born. This was the view of Saturninus, Basilides, and others. And (5) the view of the fourth gospel, and of Irenæus, that the Word was made flesh.

So much for the various statements of the doctrine. The chief contribution made to the study is the appearance of Gnosticism in its attempt to entirely rid Jesus Christ of the pollution of the flesh, and this by an ignoring of the New Testament account and by a resort to philosophic theorizing upon the basis of a half-Hebraized and degenerate Greek philosophy. Otherwise the opposing contentions of the natural birth and of the birth from Mary alone by the Power of God are practically the same as in the writings previously reviewed.

2. Irenæus's appeal to Scripture is noteworthy in that with him first we meet the use of the New Testament as an authority similar to the Old. His use of prophecy is on a par with that of Justin Martyr.<sup>60</sup> The quotation of secs. 7 and 8 will suffice to illustrate this:

<sup>59</sup> IRENÆUS, *Con. Haer.*, III, 11, 3: "Incarnatum autem et passum quidam quidem eum, qui ex dispositione sit, dicunt Jesum, quem par Mariam dicunt pertransisse, quas aquam per tubum, alii vero Demiurgi filium, in quem descendisse eum Jesum, qui ex dispositione sit; alii rursus Jesum quidem ex Joseph et Maria natum dicunt, et in hunc descendisse Christum, qui de superioribus sit; sine carne et impassibilem, existentem. Secundum autem nullam sententiam haeticorum, Verbum Dei caro factum est. Si enim quis regulas ipsorum omnium perscrutetur, inveniet quoniam sine carne, et impassibilis ab omnibus illis inducitur Dei Verbum, et qui est in superioribus Christus. Alii enim putant manifestatum eum, quemadmodum hominem transfiguratum; neque autem natum, neque incarnatum dicunt illum; alii vero neque figura meum assumpsisse hominis; sed quemadmodum columbam descendisse in eum Jesum, qui natus est ex Maria. Omnes igitur illos falsos testes ostendens discipulus Domini ait: Et Verbum caro factum est, et inhabitavit in nobis."

<sup>60</sup> See III, 9, 2 and 3; 21, 1, especially § 6, where the Ebionite contention for

On this account also Daniel [Dan. 2:34], foreseeing his advent, said that a stone cut out without hands came into this world.<sup>61</sup> For this is what "without hands" means, that his coming into this world was not by the operation of human hands, that is, of those men who are accustomed to stone-cutting; <sup>62</sup> that is, Joseph taking no part with regard to it, but Mary only co-operating with the prearranged plan. For this stone from the earth derives existence from both the power and the wisdom of God. Wherefore also Isaiah says: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I deposit in the foundations of Zion a stone, precious, elect, the chief, the corner one, to be had in honor." So then we understand that his advent in human nature was not by the will of a man, but by the will of God.<sup>63</sup> (8) Wherefore also Moses, giving a type, cast his rod <sup>64</sup> upon the earth, in order that it by becoming flesh might expose and swallow up all the opposition of the Egyptians which was lifting itself up against the prearranged plan of God; that the Egyptians themselves might testify that it is the finger of God which works salvation for the people, and not the son of Joseph. For if he were the son of Joseph, how could he be greater than Solomon or greater than Jonah or greater than David, when he was generated from the same seed, and was a descendant of these men? And how was it that he also pronounced Peter blessed because he acknowledged him to be the son of the living God? <sup>65</sup>

In the following section (9) Irenæus makes an appeal to prophecy *veānus* rather than *παρθένος* in the Immanuel passage is refuted; and §5 for a pedantic treatment of *de fructu ventris, renum, lumborum*, showing that the use of *ventris* in the promise to David predicted the virgin birth.

<sup>61</sup> See also *ibid.*, V, 25, 5 (I, 554).

<sup>62</sup> An easy adaptation of the term "carpenter" (*τέκτων*) of the canonical and apocryphal gospels, so as to make it more consonant with the quotation from Daniel.

<sup>63</sup> IRENÆUS, *Con. Haer.*, III, 21, 7: "Propter hoc autem et Daniel praevidens eius adventum, lapidem sine manibus abscissum advenisse in hunc mundum (hoc enim est quod "sine manibus") significabat; quod non operantibus humanis manibus, hoc est, virorum illorum qui solent lapides caedere, in hunc mundum eius adventus erat, id est, non operante in eum Joseph, sed sola Maria cooperante dispositioni. Hic enim lapis a terra, ex virtute et arte constat Dei. Propter hoc autem et Isaias ait: 'sic dicit Dominus: Ecce ego mitto in fundamenta Sion lapidem pretiosum, electum, summum, angularem, honorificum;' uti non ex voluntate viri, sed ex voluntate Dei, adventum eius qui secundum hominem est intelligamus."

<sup>64</sup> Note the play upon words in the original.

<sup>65</sup> IRENÆUS, *Con. Haer.*, III, 21, 8: "Propter hoc autem et Moyses ostendans typum projecit virgam in terram, ut ea incarnata omnem Aegyptiorum praevaricationem quae insurgebat adversus Dei dispositionem, argueret et absorberet; et ut ipsi Aegyptii testificarentur, quoniam digitus est Dei, qui salutem operatur populo, et non Joseph filius. Si enim Joseph filius esset, quemadmodum plus poterat quam Salomon, aut plus quam Jonas habere, aut plus esse David, cum esset ex eadem seminatione generatus, et proles existens ipsorum? Ut quid autem et beatum dicebat Petrum, quod eum cognosceret esse Filium Dei vivi?"



to show that, if Jesus were the son of Joseph, he could not be "king or heir." For in Matt. 1: 12-16 it is shown that Joseph was descended from Joachim and Jechoniah, but according to Jer. 22: 24 ff. and 36: 30 ff. these men were disinherited by God.

Those therefore who say that he was begotten of Joseph, and that they have hope in him, do cause themselves to be disinherited from the kingdom, falling under the curse and rebuke directed against Jechoniah and his seed. Because for this reason have these things been spoken against Jechoniah, the Spirit foreknowing the doctrines of the evil teachers; that they may learn that from his seed—that is, from Joseph—he was not to be born, but that, according to the promise of God, from David's belly the king eternal is raised up, who sums up all things in himself and gathered into himself the ancient formation (of man).<sup>66</sup>

The use of the New Testament centers very largely about the infancy sections.<sup>67</sup> First Cor. 15: 3, 4, 12 is used for emphasis of the real humanity of Christ, III, 17, 3 (I, 446). John 1: 13, "not born by the will of the flesh, or by the will of man," is used in III, 19, 2 (I, 449). But perhaps most significant of all is the use of Gal. 4: 4, 5 in III, 16, 3 (I, 441), and III, 22, 1 (I, 454), "God sent forth his Son, born of a woman." In fragments 52-4 (I, 577) the status of the gospels in this controversy is indicated. "With regard to Christ, the law, the prophets, and the *evangelists* have proclaimed that he was born of a virgin."<sup>68</sup>

The use of the New Testament is, on the whole, very much more reasonable than that of the Old Testament; and while the references in the Pauline epistles do not, in our thinking, contribute anything beyond a confirmation of the actual humanity of Christ (a point for which Irenæus had to contend), still one can readily understand how such a passage as Gal. 4: 4 was irresistibly attractive. But now that the gospels had become authoritative, and the infancy sections especially were so effectually used by the orthodox, it only remained for those who opposed the virgin birth to repudiate these sections. Hence we read in I, 28, 2 (I, 352):

<sup>66</sup>IRENÆUS, *ibid.*, III, 21, 9: "Qui ergo eum dicunt ex Joseph generatum et in eo habere spem, abdicatos se faciunt a regno, sub maledictione et increpatione decedentes, quae erga Jechoniam et in semen ejus. Propter hoc enim dicta sunt haec de Jechonia, spiritu praesciente ea quae a malis doctoribus dicuntur: uti discant, quoniam ex semine eius, id est ex Joseph, non erit natus, sed secundum repromissionem Dei de ventre David suscitatur rex aeternus, qui recapitulatur omnia in se et antiquam plasmationem in se recapitulatus est."

<sup>67</sup>E. g., III, 2, 9, 10; 16, 2 ff.; 21, 4; IV, 23, 1.

<sup>68</sup>EUSEBIUS, *Ch. H.*, Books V, VIII.

Besides this he [Marcion] mutilates the gospel which is according to Luke, removing all that is written respecting the generation of the Lord, and setting aside a great deal of the teaching of the Lord, in which the Lord is recorded as most clearly confessing that the maker of this universe is his Father.<sup>69</sup>

3. Passing now to Irenæus's more distinctively theological argument and deductions, we see that according to his thinking the virgin birth readily explained how the Son of God became the Son of man :

He therefore, the Son of God, our Lord, being the Word of the Father, and the son of man, since he had a generation as to his human nature from Mary—who was descended from mankind, and who was herself a human being—was made the son of man<sup>70</sup> (III, 19, 3 [I, 449]).

Moreover, the ability of Jesus and his excellence of character are not admitted as arguments for his messiahship and sonship apart from the virgin birth, as is the case in Justin Martyr, but are regarded as the consequences of such a birth (I, 30, 12 [I, 357]).

The superficial parallelism and moral antithesis between the virgin birth and the creation and fall can be best appreciated from direct quotation :

III, 21, 10 (I, 454): And as the protoplast himself, Adam, had his substance from untilled and yet virgin soil<sup>71</sup> (for God had not yet sent rain, and man had not yet tilled the ground), and was formed by the hand of God, that is, by the Word of God, for "all things were made by him," and the Lord took dust from the earth and formed man; so did he who is the Word, recapitulating Adam in himself, rightly receive a birth enabling him to gather up Adam into himself from Mary, who was as yet a virgin. If, then, the first Adam had a man for his father, and was born of human seed, it were reasonable to say that the second Adam was begotten of Joseph. But if the former was taken from the dust, and God was his maker, it was incumbent that the latter also, making a recapitulation in himself, should be formed as man by God, to have an analogy with the former as respects his origin. Why, then, did not God take dust, but wrought so that the formation should be made of Mary? It was that there might not be another formation called into being, nor any other which should require to be saved, but that

<sup>69</sup> IRENÆUS, *Con. Haer.*, I, 28, 2: "Et super haec id quod est secundum Lucam Evangelium circumcidens et omnia quae sunt de generatione Domini conscripta auferens, et de doctrina sermonum Domini multa auferens in quibus manifestissime conditorem huius universitatis suum Patrem confitens Dominus conscriptus est."

<sup>70</sup> IRENÆUS, *ibid.*, III, 19, 3: "Hic igitur Filius Dei Dominus noster, existens Verbum Patris et filius hominis: quoniam ex Maria, quae ex hominibus habebat genus quae et ipsa erat homo, habuit secundum hominem generationem, factus est filius hominis."

<sup>71</sup> Also III, 17, 7.



the same formation should be summed up, the analogy having been preserved.<sup>72</sup>

Here, as in several other similar passages, Irenæus shows a familiarity with Paul's parallelism between Adam and Jesus, but differs from Paul in pushing the parallelism into a region of which Paul was either wholly ignorant, or with which he was totally unconcerned.<sup>73</sup>

There is a significant passage in IV, 33, 4 (I, 507):

And how shall he [man] escape from the generation subject to death, if not by means of a new generation, given in a wonderful and unexpected manner, but as a sign of salvation by God—I mean that regeneration which is from the virgin through faith?<sup>74</sup> Or how shall they receive adoption from God, if they remain in this kind of generation, which is naturally possessed by man in this world? And how should he [Christ] have been greater than Solomon or greater than Jonah, or have been the Lord of David, who was of the same substance as they were?<sup>75</sup>

Such a statement, taken together with the Paulinistic elaboration in III, 19, 1, makes the foundation for Irenæus's final dogmatic assertion:

Those who assert that he was simply a mere man, begotten by Joseph remaining in the bondage of the primal disobedience, are in a state of death having been not as yet joined to the Word of God the Father, nor receiving liberty through the Son, as he does himself declare: If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed<sup>76</sup> (III, 19 [I, 448]).

<sup>72</sup> IRENÆUS, *Con. Haer.*, III, 21, 10: "Et quemadmodum protoplastus ille Adam de rudi terra, et de adhuc virgine, (nondum enim pluerat Deus, et homo non erat operatus terram) habuit substantiam: et plasmatus est manu Dei, id est Verbo Dei (omnia enim per ipsum facta sunt) et sumpsit Dominus limum a terra, et plasmavit hominem: ita recapitulans in se Adam, ipse Verbum existens ex Maria, quae adhuc erat virgo, recte accipiebat generationem Adae recapitulationis. *et τοίνυν ὁ πρῶτος Ἀδὰμ ἔσχε πατέρα ἄνθρωπον καὶ ἐξ ἀνδρὸς σπέρματος ἐγεννήθη εἰκὸς ἦν καὶ τὸν δεύτερον Ἀδὰμ λέγειν ἐξ Ἰωσήφ γεγενῆσθαι· εἰ δὲ ἐκεῖνος ἐκ γῆς ἐλήφθη. Πλάστῃς δὲ αὐτοῦ ὁ θεός, ἔδει καὶ τὸν ἀνακεφαλαιούμενον εἰς αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πεπλασμένον ἄνθρωπον, τὴν αὐτὴν ἐκείνῳ τῆς γεννήσεως ἔχειν ὁμοίτητα. εἰς τί οὖν πάλιν οὐκ ἔλαβε χοῦν ὁ θεός, ἀλλ' ἐκ Μαρίας ἐνήργησε τὴν πλάσιν γενέσθαι; ἵνα μὴ ἄλλη πλάσις γένηται μηδὲ ἄλλο τὸ σωζόμενον ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἐκεῖνος ἀνακεφαλαιωθῇ τηρουμένης τῆς ὁμοιότητος."*

<sup>73</sup> See also III, 21, 4 (I, 455); V, 19, 1 (I, 547); and V, 21, 1 (I, 584).

<sup>74</sup> See III, 19, 1 (I, 448); IV, 33, 11 (I, 509); V, 1, 1, 2, 3 (I, 527).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 33, 4: "Quemadmodum autem relinquet mortis generationem, si non in novam generationem mire et inopinate a Deo, in signum autem salutis, datam, quae est ex virgine per fidem, regenerationem? vel quam adoptionem accipient a Deo, permanentes in hac genesi, quae est secundum hominem in hoc mundo? Quomodo autem plus quam Salomon, et plus quam Jonas habebat, et Dominus erat David, qui eiusdem cum ipsis fuit substantiae?"

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 19, 1: "Rursus autem qui unde tantum hominem eum dicunt ex Joseph generatum, perseverantes in servitutē pristinae inobedientiae moriuntur: non-

We have traced the doctrine in Irenæus, noticing its multiform statement arising from the conviction of its great importance and the menacing features of the different forms of Gnosticism. The appeal to Scripture is seen to be, in the case of prophecy at least, no more praiseworthy than that of Justin Martyr, while his appeal to the New Testament is much more straightforward, and constitutes a new feature in the study. The more distinctly theological argument is based upon a fanciful, though somewhat Pauline, analogy whose force is not felt today. The argument makes the virgin birth the basal and essential factor in constituting Jesus a fit and capable Savior for lost and polluted man, hence those who do not believe in the virgin birth are "in the bondage of the old disobedience" and "in a state of death." Of course, the other and silent premise underlying this conclusion is that right belief concerning the nature of Christ is necessary to salvation.

1. In conclusion it should be pointed out that, while Irenæus makes a copious use of the canonical infancy stories,<sup>77</sup> he has no reference to the apocryphal accounts, although they would very naturally have been called for in such a passage as IV, 23, § 1. Moreover, it would appear (I, 27, § 2 [I, 352]) that, in the case of the heretic Marcion at least, there existed no apocryphal source of the kind which he needed for his denial of the miraculous generation of Jesus, so that it was necessary for him so to mutilate the gospel of Luke that it might suit his purpose. Nor is there evidence that any of the heretics knew of gospels other than the canonical to which to appeal in advancing or supporting their variant views.

2. In his understanding of the virgin birth Irenæus has passed clear away from the thought of a miraculous but real birth (devoid of the slightest intimation of pre-existence), such as the accounts in Matthew and Luke teach and Ignatius and Justin clearly, though not consistently, imply, and in his adoption of the view of the fourth gospel has converted the virgin birth into an advent or an incarnation in a more rigid and uniform sense than previously prevailed; *e. g.*, *Contra Haer.*, I, 25, 1 (I, 330); III, 9, 3 (I, 423); III, 11, 3 (I, 427). But, at the same time, in his thinking the divine sonship and nature of Jesus were based upon the fact that God, and not man, was his father (III, 21, § 8 [I, 453]).

dum commisti Verbo Dei Patris, neque per Filium percipientes libertatem, quemadmodum ipse ait: 'Si Filius vos manumiserit vere liberi eritis.'

<sup>77</sup> *E. g.*, III, 9, 2 and 3 (I, 423 ff.); III, 16, 2, 3, and 4 (I, 440 ff.); III, 21, 4 and 5 (I, 452); IV, 23, 1 (I, 494); V, 25, 5 (I, 554).



3. Thus in Irenæus we meet what is so far the clearest statement of Jesus' derivation of divine nature from the fact that God is his father; but Irenæus's chief contribution to the study is in the theological significance which he attributed to the virgin birth; for in his thinking it was only by such a birth that Jesus could be constituted the adequate Savior of mankind—and so far as his moral worth being sufficient *per se* to constitute him Messiah and Son of God, Irenæus, making a bold advance from the position of the earliest apologists, asserted that the pre-eminence of Jesus and his unique moral worth were dependent upon the virgin birth.

VII. TERTULLIAN (about 150–240 A. D.).—There are in Tertullian nearly a score of passages in which a statement of belief regarding the virgin birth is made. The most simple of these are: *Veiling of Virgins*, IV, 3, 1 (IV, 27); *Monogamy*, 8 (IV, 65); *Against Praxeas*, 2 (III, 598), 26, 27 (III, 622 ff.); and *Patience*, 3 (III, 708). Other passages, which make some significant addition to the bare statement, are: *Apol.*, 21 (III, 34), including a repudiation of the Greek myths; *Soul*, 26 (III, 207), with a reference to the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, and the prenatal testimony of John; *Against Heretics*, 36 (III, 260), and *Against Marcion*, V, 19 (III, 471), each included in the church's statement of faith; *Resurrection*, 20 (III, 559), with emphasis upon the real humanity of Jesus; *Against Valentinus*, 27 (III, 516), stating the belief of Valentinus:

His position being one which must be decided by prepositions; in other words, he was produced *by means of (per)* a virgin rather than *of (ex)* a virgin! On the ground that, having descended into the Virgin rather in the manner of a passage through her than of a birth by her, he came into existence *through (per)* her, not *of (ex)* her—not experiencing a mother in her, but nothing more than a way. Upon this same Christ, therefore, so they say, the Savior descended in the sacrament of baptism in the likeness of a dove.<sup>78</sup> There are also two references to the belief of Praxeas and the Patripassionists: *Against Praxeas*, 17 (III, 617), and 1 (III, 597):

He says that the Father himself came down into the Virgin, was himself born of her, himself suffered, indeed was himself Jesus Christ.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>78</sup>TERTULLIAN, *Adv. Valentinianos*, XXVII: "In praepositionum quaestionibus positum, id est per virginem, non ex virgine editum, quia delatus in virginem transmeatoris potius quam generatoris more processerit: per ipsam, non ex ipsa; non matrem eam, sed viam passus. Super hunc itaque Christum devolasse tunc in baptismatis sacramento Sotorem per effigiem columbae."

<sup>79</sup>TERTULLIAN, *Adv. Praxeas*, I: "Ipsum dicit Patrem descendisse in Virginem, ipsum ex ea natum, ipsum passum, denique ipsum esse Jesum Christum."

Of the statements here cited and quoted, that of Praxeas appears for the first time. The Patripassion theory undoubtedly arose from the difficulty of conceiving of a dual or triune God, and as a consistent effort to escape ditheism or tritheism.

Somewhat akin to the superficial argument about terms,<sup>80</sup> and yet showing Tertullian's rather scholastic reasoning in maintenance of the humanity of Christ, and, *secondarily*, of the virginity of Mary, is the passage in *Against Marcion*, IV, 10 (III, 358, 360). The argument is quite syllogistic: Christ cannot lie. He said he was the son of man. Therefore he had a human parent. But God was his father. Therefore Mary, his mother, was the human parent. But, if so, she was a virgin. Otherwise he had two fathers, a divine and a human one, the thought of which is ridiculous, like the stories of Castor and Hercules. Moreover, the prophecy of Isaiah is alone fulfilled by the exclusion of a human father and the acceptance of the virginity of Mary. If Marcion admits Christ to be the son of man through a human father, he thereby denies that he is son of God; if through a divine one also, he makes Christ the Hercules of fable; if through a human mother only, he concedes Tertullian's point; if not through a human father or a human mother, he involves Christ in a lie.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> See *Veiling of Virgins*, 6 (IV, 31), and treatise on *Prayer*, 22 (III, 688).

<sup>81</sup> TERTULLIAN, *Adv. Marcionem*, IV, 10: "De filio hominis duplex est nostra praescriptio, neque mentiri posse Christum, ut se filium hominis pronuntiaret, si non vere erat; neque filium constitui, qui non sit natus ex homine, vel patre vel matre: atque ita discutiendum, cujus hominis filius accipi debeat, patris an matris. Si ex Deo patre est, utique non ex homine: si non ex homine, jam apparet quia ex virgine. Cui enim homo pater non datur, nec vir matri ejus deputabitur; porro cui vir non deputabitur, virgo est. Caeterum, duo jam patres habebuntur, Deus et homo, si non virgo sit mater. Habebit enim virum, ut virgo non sit; et habendo virum, duos patres faciet, Deum et hominem, et qui et Dei et hominis esset filius. Talem, si forte, Castori aut Herculi nativitatem tradunt fabulae.

"Si haec ita distinguuntur, id est, si ex matre filius est hominis, quia ex patre non est; ex matre autem virgine, quia non ex patre homine; his erit Christus Isaiae, quem concepturam virginem praedicat. Qua igitur ratione admittas filium hominis, Marcion, circumspicere non possum. Si patris hominis, negas Dei filium; si et Dei, Herculem de fabula facis Christum: si matris tantum hominis, meum concedis; si neque matris hominis, ergo nullius hominis, est filius, et necesse est mendacium admiserit, qui se quod non erat dixit. Unum potest angustiis tuis subvenire, si audeas aut Deum tuum patrem Christi hominem quoque cognominare, quod de Aeone fecit Valentinus; aut virginem hominem negare, quod ne Valentinus quidem fecit. . . .

"Nam in illam necesse est amentiam tendat, ut et filium hominis defendat, nec mendacem eum faciat; et ex homine neget natum, ne filium virginis concedat. . . . Si natus ex homine est, ut filius hominis, corpus ex corpore est," etc.



Such a line of reasoning has peculiar interest in that it shows how strenuously Tertullian could defend the real *humanity* of Christ—for this was Tertullian's constant task—by an appeal to the virgin birth. Of like interest is his badly stated belief that the part played by God in the generation of Jesus was such as to utterly *exclude* human fatherhood; that God, though in no gross sense, was the substitute<sup>82</sup> for a human begetter; that the dual nature of Christ depends simply upon his parentage—being divine, because God, and no man, was his father; human, because Mary was his mother. The premises are that Christ is divine (this is not only admitted, but given an unwarranted emphasis by his heretical opponents); that his nature depends upon his parentage; that therefore that humanity which he, who could not lie, claimed for himself could not come from his father; it must, therefore, come from his mother; but, granting the above, it could come from her only through the virgin birth.

In *The Flesh of Christ*, chap. 23 (III, 541), there is a semi-scholastic attempt to show that the Virgin's conception and parturition are the sign spoken of by Simeon, and long before by Isaiah; and, moreover, that Mary, though a virgin, was in reality the purely human mother of the human Christ. The saying, "Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord," is applicable solely to the Son of God, since only in the case of a virgin birth does a *child* open the womb.

There is a principle laid down in *Ad Nationes*, 3 (III, 131), which explains Tertullian's belief as to the person of Christ, and, as tributary to that, the virgin birth also:

It is a settled point that a god is born of a god, and that which lacks divinity is born of that which is not divine.<sup>83</sup>

This very simple philosophy is the clue to the "Son of God—son of man" passages such as *Apol.*, 21 (III, 34, 35); *Flesh of Christ*, 5 (III, 525), and especially 18 (III, 537).

Turning to prophecy, we find Tertullian using it in much the same way as did Justin Martyr and Irenæus. In his *Answer to Jews*, 9 (III, 161), he resorts to the already familiar argument that, apart from the *virgin* birth, the promise of a sign in the Immanuel prophecy<sup>84</sup> is meaningless; and in *Against Marcion*, III, 12 (III, 331), he reiterates the same contention, and points out, moreover, as did Justin Martyr

<sup>82</sup> As opposed to this theory, see ORIGEN, *De Principiis*, I, 2, sec. 4 (IV, 247).

<sup>83</sup> TERTULLIAN, *Ad Nationes*, II, 3c: "Scitum, deum e deo nasci, quemadmodum de non deo non deum."

<sup>84</sup> Also *Flesh of Christ*, 17 (III, 536).

(*Dial.*, 77 ff.), that in the coming of the magi the remainder of the prophecy, as to receiving the riches of Damascus, etc., was fulfilled.

In his *Answer to Jews*, 9 (III, 164), he demonstrates that, according to Isa. 11:1, 2, Jesus procures his Davidic descent through the virgin Mary. Chap. 21 of *The Flesh of Christ* (III, 539) makes a combined argument from the Immanuel prophecy, the annunciation to Mary, and Elizabeth's salutation to Mary, to show that she was the actual human mother of Jesus, through whom he was a descendant of David,<sup>85</sup> and that from her he who was the Word of God derived his flesh. Tertullian's use of "flesh" here is not synonymous with his use of "humanity" in the important reference in *Marcion*, IV, 10. Here "flesh" is used in the literal sense to designate that with which the pre-existent Word clothed himself; there the thought of pre-existence is absent, and the dual nature of Christ is explained by his generation. The virgin birth is supported by an appeal to the question in Isa., chap. 53, "Who shall declare his nativity?" from which Tertullian infers that no human being was aware of the nativity of Christ at his conception.<sup>86</sup> He also interprets the LXX of Ps. 110:3 (Ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐγγένησά σε): "Before the morning star did I beget thee from the womb"—as referring both to the time of Christ's birth and to the manner. "'I have begotten thee from the womb;' that is to say, from a womb only, without a man's seed, making it a condition of a fleshly body that it should come out of a womb."

In the more distinctive use of the New Testament the chief effort is, as in the foregoing, to emphasize the real humanity and Davidic descent of Christ rather than to substantiate his virgin birth. These three subjects, however, have a natural affinity for each other, and are often found in combination in Tertullian's mind. His references<sup>87</sup> to Matt. 1:1; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8; Gal. 3:8, 16, are ordinary instances of this use of the New Testament. The twentieth chapter on *The Flesh of Christ* (III, 538) has a long dissertation to prove that Christ was born *of* (*ex*) Mary, partaking of her flesh, as does any child from any mother. The Gnostic heretics, denying the reality of his body, contended that he was begotten *in* (*in*) Mary, but not *of* (*ex*) her, using for their purpose Matt. 1:20, τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματος ἐστὶν ἁγίου. In reply, Tertullian quotes the ἐξ of Matt. 1:16 and Gal. 4:4, "*made of a woman*" (γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός), to good effect, but descends to his usually poor exegesis in the use of

<sup>85</sup> See also *Against Marcion*, III, 20 (III, 338, 339).

<sup>86</sup> *Answer to Jews*, 13 (III, 171).

<sup>87</sup> *Flesh of Christ*, 22 (III, 540).



Ps. 22:9, 10, "Thou art he that didst draw me out of my mother's womb." Equally indefensible is his exegesis of the singular misreading<sup>88</sup> which he maintains in John 1:13, and tortures into denying Jesus' birth from sexual intercourse, while admitting or affirming that he was born of real flesh.

The Gnostics were also using Matt. 12:48 to support their denial of the reality of Jesus' body,<sup>89</sup> contending that those who announced the presence of his mother and brethren did so to test him, and to determine whether he were actually of a human family, which fact, they claimed, was practically denied by his reply. But Tertullian's readiness to interpret figurative language, however fatal in most instances, did him good service in this.

It is difficult to believe that Tertullian could have been as ignorant of the gospels as would appear from what a strict interpretation of his language implies; viz., that all four of the gospels assert the virgin birth.

Of the apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instil faith into us; whilst of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterward. These all start with the same principles of faith, so far as relates to the one only God the Creator, and his Christ, born of the Virgin, fulfilling the law and the prophets. Now, of the authors whom he possesses, Marcion<sup>90</sup> seems to have singled out Luke for his mutilating process. Luke, however, was not an apostle, but only an apostolic man; not a master, but a disciple, and so inferior to a master—at least as far subsequent to him as the apostle whom he followed [Paul] was subsequent to the others.<sup>91</sup>

The possibility that the gospels of John and Mark, originally or at an early date, contained stories of the virgin birth might be entertained here, were we certain that Tertullian wrote this passage with a full consciousness of just what he was saying, and if we were, furthermore, certain of what he meant by "These all *start* with the same principles of faith . . . (how that he was) born of the Virgin." Does he mean that all four gospels make this fact the foundation of faith in

<sup>88</sup> *Flesh of Christ*, 19 (III, 537). Also IRENÆUS, *Against Heresies*, III, 19, 2 (1-449).

<sup>89</sup> *Against Marcion*, IV, 19 (III, 377, 378). Also, *Flesh of Christ*, 7 (III, 527).

<sup>90</sup> The gospel of Marcion began with Luke 3:1, followed immediately by 4:31-37, then 4:16, with numerous omissions.

<sup>91</sup> TERTULLIAN, *Adv. Marcionem*, IV, 2. "Denique nobis fidem, nobis fidem ex apostolis Joannes et Matthaeus insinuant; ex apostolicis, Lucas et Marcus instaurant, isdem regulis exorsi, quantum ad unicum Deum attinet Creatorem, et Christum ejus, natum ex Virgine, supplementum Legis et Prophetarum. . . . Nam ex iis commentatoribus quos habemus, Lucam videtur Marcion elegisse, quem caederet. Porro Lucas non apostolus sed apostolicus; non magister, sed discipulus; utque magistro minor; certe tanto posterior, quanto posterioris apostoli sectator, Pauli sine dubio," etc.

Christ? Or does he mean that each evangelist literally begins his gospel with the account of Jesus' birth from the Virgin? The context, which is dealing with actual narratives and attempting to show their relative value, supports the literal interpretation by which we understand Tertullian to say that each of the four gospels begins by setting forth the fact that Christ was born of the Virgin.

But, since Tertullian is wholly unsupported in this respect by the Fathers or versions, we are compelled to reject his statement as being rather free and exaggerated, or, indeed, to explain it upon the basis of his teaching as elsewhere represented. This can be done, and is perhaps the true solution of the difficulty. It was seen that, according to the treatise *Against Marcion*, IV, 10, a postulation of the divinity of Jesus made the virgin birth necessary as the explanation of his humanity. To assert the former was to affirm the latter, and it was by the unique birth of Jesus that his dual nature was explained. Now, as Tertullian looks at the matter, while it is true that only Matthew and Luke give, at the beginning of their gospels, the actual narratives of the peculiar birth of Jesus, both Mark and John clearly assert the fact which is inseparable from the virgin birth, viz., that God is the father of Jesus. Thus, if Tertullian accepted the uncertain reading of *υἱοῦ θεοῦ* in Mark 1:1, which reading Irenæus before him had used, and resorted, as he usually did, to the singular and erroneous interpretation of John 1:13, which makes God the begetter of Christ, or even to the assertion of the divine sonship as set forth in John 1:18—then, to all intents and purposes, and by inevitable deduction, the second and fourth gospels do, in his opinion, start with the assertion that Christ was born of a virgin.

It is interesting to notice, in passing, his comparative valuation of Mark and Luke, especially of the latter, and of Paul. His low valuation of Luke was no doubt for the purpose of weakening Marcion's position, as was also his unwarranted assertion regarding the other gospels. It was as much as saying: "Marcion may do what he likes with the gospel of Luke, but he still has the other and better gospels to reckon with, if he wishes to discard the true nativity of Christ and the virgin birth."

An interesting point noticed in the writers preceding Tertullian is that of the analogy between the virgin birth and the Genesis story of creation, between Mary and Eve. In chap. 17, on *The Flesh of Christ* (III, 536), in connection with an argument to prove the reality of the flesh of Christ, Tertullian makes an elaborate use of this analogy:



Now it will be first necessary to show what previous reason there was for the Son of God's being born of a virgin. He who was going to consecrate a new order of birth must himself be born after a novel fashion. . . . Accordingly a virgin did conceive and bear Emmanuel, God with us. This is the new nativity; a man is born in God. And in this man God was born, taking the flesh of an ancient race, without the help, however, of the ancient seed, in order that he might reform it with a new seed, that is, in a spiritual manner, and cleanse it by the removal of all its ancient stains. But the whole of this innovation was prefigured, as was the case in all instances, in ancient type, the Lord being born as man by a dispensation in which a virgin was the medium. The earth was still in a virgin state, reduced as yet by no human labor, with no seed as yet cast into its furrows, when, as we are told, God made man out of it into a living soul. As, then, the first Adam is thus taken from the ground, it is a just inference that the second Adam likewise, as the apostle has told us, was formed by God into a quickening spirit out of the ground—in other words, out of a flesh which was unstained as yet by any human generation.<sup>92</sup> But that I may lose no opportunity of supporting my argument from the name of Adam, why is Christ called Adam by the apostle, unless it be that, as man, he was of that earthly origin? And even reason here maintains the same conclusion, because it was by just the contrary operation that God recovered his own image and likeness, of which he had been robbed by the devil. For it was while Eve was yet a virgin that the ensnaring word had crept into her ears which was to build the edifice of death. Into a virgin's soul, in like manner, must be introduced that word of God which was to raise the fabric of life, so that what had been reduced to ruin by this sex might, by the selfsame sex, be recovered to salvation. As Eve had believed the serpent, so Mary believed Gabriel. The delinquency which the one occasioned by believing, the other by believing effaced. But (it will be said) Eve did not at the devil's word conceive in her womb. Well, she at all events conceived; for the devil's word afterward became as seed to her that she should conceive as an outcast and bring forth in sorrow. Indeed, she gave birth to a fratricidal devil; whilst Mary, on the contrary, bare one who was one day to secure salvation to Israel, his own brother after the flesh and the murderer of himself. God, therefore, sent down into the virgin's womb his Word, as the good brother who should blot out the memory of the evil brother. Hence it was necessary that Christ should come forth for the salvation of man in that condition of flesh into which man had entered ever since his condemnation.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>92</sup> See also *Answer to Jews*, 12 (III, 169); *Flesh of Christ*, 16 (III, 536); *Resurrection*, 49 (III, 582).

<sup>93</sup> TERTULLIAN, *Lib. de Carne Christi*, XVII: "Ante omnia autem commendanda erit ratio quae praefuit, ut Dei filius de virgine nasceretur. Nove nasci debebat novae nativitatis dedicator, de qua signum daturus Dominus ab Isaia praedicabatur. Quod est istud signum? Ecce virgo concipiet in utero, et pariet filium (Isa. vii). Conceptit

The apparent ultimate dogmatic statement of Tertullian is found in his discourse *Against Marcion*, IV, 36 (III, 411):

Whosoever wishes to see Jesus the son of David must believe in him through the virgin's birth. He who will not believe this will not hear from him the salutation, "Thy faith hath saved thee." And so he will remain blind, falling into antithesis after antithesis which mutually destroy each other, just as the blind man leads the blind down into the ditch.<sup>94</sup>

There is not as much, however, in this saying regarding the virgin birth as would at first sight be supposed. For the context shows that the point at issue is not the virgin birth, but rather Jesus' Davidic descent and his possession of an actual body. In support of these last two contentions Tertullian appeals to the healing of the blind man at the entrance to Jericho, Luke 18:35-43. The man persistently cried out: "Jesus, thou *son of David*, have mercy on me!" In response to which, and thus in recognition of his Davidic descent, Jesus performed the cure.

It must be remembered also that in the writings of Tertullian the term "the virgin" is, through the passing over of what was formerly a descriptive adjective into a proper name, frequently used to designate igitur virgo et peperit Emmanuelem, nobiscum Deum. Haec est nativitatis nova, dum homo nascitur in Deo; in quo homine Deus natus est, carne atque seminis suscepta, sine semine antiquo ut illam novo semine, id est spiritaliter reformaret exclusis antiquitatis sordibus, expiatam. Sed tota novitas ista, sicut et in omnibus, de veteri figura est, rationali per virginem dispositione Domino nascente. Virgo erat adhuc terra nondum opere compressa, nondum sementi subacta: ex ea hominem factum accepimus a Deo in animam vivam. Igitur si primus Adam de terra traditur, merito sequens, vel novissimus Adam, ut Apostolus dixit, proinde de terra, id est, carne nondum generationi resignata, in spiritum vivificantem a Deo est prolatus. Et tamen, ne mihi vacet incursus nominis Adae, unde Christus Adam ab Apostolo dictus est, si terreni non fuit census homo ejus? Sed et hic ratio defendit, quod Deus imaginem et similitudinem suam, a diabolo captam, aemula operatione recuperavit. In virginem enim adhuc Evam irrepererat verbum aedificatorium mortis; in virginem aequae introducendum erat Dei Verbum exstructorium vitae: ut quod per ejus modi sexum abierat in perditionem, per eundem sexum redigeretur in salutem. Crediderat Eva serpenti: credidit Maria Gabrieli. Quod illa credendo deliquit, haec credendo delevit. Sed Eva nihil tunc concepit in utero ex diaboli verbo. Imo concepit. Nam exinde ut abjecta pareret, et in doloribus pareret, verbum diaboli semen illi fuit. Enixa est denique diabolus fratricidam. Contra, Maria eum edidit, qui carnalem fratrem Israel, interemptorem suum, salvum quandoque praestaret. In vulvam ergo Deus Verbum suum detulit, bonum fratrem, ut memoriam mali fratris eraderet. Inde prodeundum fuit Christo ad salutem hominis, quo homo jam damnatus intraverat."

<sup>94</sup>TERTULLIAN, *Adv. Marcionem*, IV, 36: "Qui vult videre Jesum, David filium, credat per Virginis censum. Qui non ita credet, non audiet ab illo: Fides tua te salvum fecit. Atque ita caecus remanebit, ruens in antithesim, ruentem et ipsam antithesim. Sic enim caecus caecum deducere solet."



Mary. This is quite similar to the more familiar transition from Jesus the Christ to Jesus Christ, and finally to Christ, as the personal proper name. Bearing in mind the context and the interchangeable use of "The Virgin" and "Mary," this passage is taken to mean that, by the analogy of what took place at the blind man's confession and request, whoever wishes to see Jesus spiritually (savingly) must believe that he was actually born into this world with real flesh, being the son of Mary, David's descendant. To deny this is to remain in spiritual blindness and to perish.

Evidently Tertullian's final word as to the condition of those who disbelieve in the *virgin* birth is not as specific and unmistakable as that of Irenæus.<sup>95</sup> This is due, however, to a difference in the ends sought by his polemic, and hence in his emphasis, rather than to different conviction as to the essentialness of belief in the virgin birth. For, very clearly, it is only by means of the virgin birth that he is able to give what seems to him a consistent explanation of the humanity and the divinity of Jesus.

1. A review of the material presented by Tertullian will show that for purposes of argument he uses the canonical infancy stories only—*Ans. to Jews*, 9 (III, 164); *Soul*, 26 (III, 207); *Marcion*, III, 12 (III, 331); *ibid.*, V, 9 (III, 448)—and that, in so far as the apocryphal gospels taught the perpetual virginity of Mary, he was uninfluenced by them and insisted upon a real birth (*Flesh of Christ*, 23 (III, 541)). On the other hand, Tertullian does not wholly repudiate the use of other gospels of the Lord's nativity which he recognizes as in circulation, but for himself abstains from anything but a very sparing use of them. (*Against Praxeas*, 26 [III, 632].) His reference, like that of Irenæus to the mutilation of Luke by Marcion, indicates that the heretics also recognized the canonical gospels as the basis of appeal.

2. Tertullian is divided in his own mind between the representation of pre-existence as made in the fourth gospel and the generation of a new being as given in the first and third gospels. Both thoughts are expressed by him, but not harmonized.

3. Perhaps Tertullian's increment to the study lies chiefly in the fact of his noteworthy use of the virgin birth to prove the *humanity* of Jesus, and, secondarily, in his throwing light upon the increasing extra-canonical sources; while at the same time his straight-going theory of imparted nature as in human generation keeps his argument in a rather pagan sphere.

<sup>95</sup> *Against Heresies*, III, 19 (I, 448, 449).

VIII. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (died about 220 A. D.)<sup>96</sup> seldom refers to the virgin birth. A sentence from *The Instructor*, I, 6 (II, 220), gives very clear evidence of the increasing exaltedness of Mary, however, and of her trend toward deity:

The universal Father is one, and one the universal Word; the Holy Spirit is one and the same everywhere, and one is the only virgin mother.<sup>97</sup>

It is true that Clement immediately proceeds to liken Mary to the church, and even to identify her with it in his allegorical cast of thinking; but, nevertheless, such an utterance serves as an index of the direction in which the current of thought has set. More significant is *Stromata*, VII, 16 (II, 551):

But, as appears, many even down to our own time regard Mary, on account of the birth of her child, as having been in the puerperal state, although she was not. For some say that after she brought forth she was found, when examined, to be a virgin. Now such, to us, are the Scriptures of the Lord, which gave birth to the truth and continue virgin in the concealment of the mysteries of the truth.<sup>98</sup>

This illustration, colored by the rather occult sentiment of the "true Gnostics," who recognize "the son of the Omnipotent, not by his flesh conceived in the womb, but by his Father's own power," serves to verify the tendency already noted, and to indicate the significant presence of apocryphal material. Its seeming conflict with the defense of physical generation made in *Stromata*, III, 17 (II, 400), is not to be wondered at in a treatise that makes no attempt at homogeneity and consistency. To the Gnostic the spiritual lesson is everything. Incidentally we get a few of the underlying facts, and from these, though scanty, we must reconstruct, as far as possible, Clement's theory of the virgin birth.

1. It is evident that he was acquainted with both the Johannine and the synoptic sources; and it is equally clear that he was influenced by some apocryphal source or sources<sup>99</sup> similar to the gospel of James.

2. He believed in the pre-existence—*Strom.*, VI, 15 (II, 508)—as

<sup>96</sup> EUSEBIUS, *Church History*, Book V, 11, and Book VI, 6, 13.

<sup>97</sup> εἰς μὲν ὁ τῶν ὄλων Πατήρ. εἰς δὲ καὶ ὁ τῶν ὄλων Λόγος. καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ πανταχοῦ. μία δὲ μόνη γὰρ μήτηρ παρθένος.

<sup>98</sup> CLEMENTIS ALEXANDRINI *Stromatum*, Lib. VII, cap. xvi: 'Ἄλλ', ὡς ἔοικεν, τοῖς πολλοῖς καὶ μέχρι νῦν δοκεῖ ἡ Μαριάμ λεχῶ εἶναι διὰ τὴν τοῦ παιδίου γέννησιν οὐκ οὔσα λεχῶ. καὶ γὰρ μετὰ τὸ τεκεῖν αὐτὴν μαιωθείσαν φασὶ τινες παρθένον εὐρεθῆναι. τοιαῦται δ' ἡμῖν αἱ κυριακαὶ Γραφαὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀποτίκτουςαι, καὶ μένουςαι παρθένοι μετὰ τῆς ἐπικρύφους τῶν τῆς ἀληθείας μυστηρίων.

<sup>99</sup> See mention of "Gospel according to the Hebrews," *Strom.*, II, 9.



also in the real birth of Jesus—*Strom.*, III, 17 (II, 400); but just how much of miracle the apocryphal sources had instilled into his belief, in addition to the miraculous conception of the canonical accounts, cannot be definitely decided. Judging by *Strom.*, VII, 16, he was attracted toward a belief in the miraculous *birth* as well as in the miraculous conception.

3. Clement's increment to the study is noteworthy, inasmuch as he is the first of our contributors to look with decided favor upon the apocryphal material; and, while he uses it for illustration chiefly, it is nevertheless at the church doors waiting for admission. It had not long to wait. In fact, the exaltation toward deity which with Clement begins to be attributed to Mary is undoubtedly due to the influence of the apocryphal material and the traditions embodied therein.

IX. ORIGEN<sup>100</sup> (185-254) gives frequent statements of the doctrines of the virgin birth, including the orthodox, the heretical, and what may be called the Gnostic-orthodox. In the first class are such passages as *De Prin.*, preface (IV, 240) and II, 6 (IV, 281); *Against Celsus*, I, 7 (IV, 399), and *Com. Jno.*, I, 39, and X, 23 (IX, 315, 403); and also *Against Celsus*, II, 25 (IV, 473), where the reality of the body of Jesus is emphasized in comparison with the mystic entrance of the spirit of Apollo into the priestess of the Pythian cave. In the second class is the belief of Celsus stated in *Against Celsus*, I, 59 (IV, 427); and a reference to the common belief of Jesus' contemporaries in *Com. Mt.*, X, 20, and *Jno.*, VI, 7 (IX, 427, 355). In the third class there is a passage which shows how easily the "true" Gnostic could satisfy himself in the matter of Jesus' parentage through his ready idealizing and spiritualizing faculty. It serves as an indication of the fact that, apart from precise historic reality, the semi-Gnostic was able to worship Christ as the supreme spiritual ideal, and his liability to error was never in the direction of subtracting those things which made for the divinity of Jesus.

If anyone should lend credence to the gospel according to the Hebrews, where the Savior himself says, "My mother the Holy Spirit took me just now by one of my hairs and carried me off to the great Mount Tabor," he will have to face the difficulty of explaining how the Holy Spirit can be the mother of Christ when it was itself brought into existence through the Word. But neither the passage nor this difficulty is hard to explain. For if he who does the will of the Father in heaven is Christ's brother and sister and mother, and if the name of brother of Christ may be applied, not only to the race of

<sup>100</sup> EUSEBIUS, *Church History*, VI, 2-4, 8, 16, 19, 23, 30, 32, 36.

men, but to beings of diviner rank than they, then there is nothing absurd in the Holy Spirit's being his mother, everyone being his mother who does the will of the Father in heaven.<sup>101</sup> (*Com. Jno.*, II, 6 [IX, 329].)

But the statement of the theories with respect to the parentage of Jesus is incomplete without noticing the more distinctively Jewish contentions which cause Origen to pass over more perceptibly into the region of argument and refutation. A common Jewish story is represented in *Against Celsus*, I, 28 (IV, 408):

For he represents him disputing with Jesus, and confuting him, as he thinks, on many points; and in the first place he accuses him of having invented his birth from a virgin, and upbraids him with having been born in a Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out-of-doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child, who, having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt, on account of his poverty, and having there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed himself a god."<sup>102</sup>

An elaboration of this story and its refutation are found in chaps. 32 and 33:

But let us now return to where the Jew is introduced, speaking of the mother of Jesus and saying that when she was pregnant she was turned out-of-doors by the carpenter, to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery, and that she bore a child to a certain soldier named Pan-

<sup>101</sup> ORIGENIS *Comment. in Joan.*, II, 6: 'Εὰν δὲ προσέταί τις τὸ καθ' Ἑβραίους Εὐαγγέλιον, ἔνθα αὐτὸς ὁ Ζωτὴρ φησιν. "Ἄρτι ἔλαβέ με ἡ μήτηρ μου τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα ἐν μίᾳ τῶν τριχῶν μου, καὶ ἀπένεγκέ με εἰς τὸ ὄρος τὸ μέγα θαβώρ. ἐπαπορήσει πῶς μήτηρ Χριστοῦ τὸ διὰ τοῦ Λόγου γεγενημένον Πνεῦμα ἅγιον εἶναι δύναται. Ταῦτα δὲ καὶ τοῦτο οὐ Χαλεπὸν ἐρμηνεύσαι. Εἰ γὰρ ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Πατρὸς τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς ἀδελφὸς καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ, καὶ φθάσει τὸ ἀδελφὸς Χριστοῦ ὄνομα οὐ μόνον ἐπὶ τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τοῦτου θεϊότερα. οὐδὲν ἄτοπον ἔσται μάλλον πάσης χρηματισούσης μητρὸς Χριστοῦ διὰ τὸ ποιεῖν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς Πατρὸς, τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον εἶναι μητέρα.

<sup>102</sup> ORIGENIS *Contra Celsum*, I, 28: μετὰ ταῦτα προσωποποιεῖ Ἰουδαῖον αὐτῷ διαλεγόμενον, τῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἐλέγχοντα αὐτὸν περὶ πολλῶν μὲν, ὡς οἴεται, πρῶτον δὲ, ὡς πλασάμενον αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐκ παρθένου γένεσιν. ὀνειδίζει δ' αὐτῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ ἐκ κόμης αὐτὸν γεγονέναι Ἰουδαϊκῆς, καὶ ἀπὸ γυναικὸς ἐγγχωρίου καὶ πενιχρᾶς, καὶ χερνήτιδος φησι δ' αὐτὴν καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ γήμαντος, τέκοντος τὴν τέχνην ὄντος, ἐξεῶσθαι, ἐλεγχθεῖσαν ὡς μεμοιχευμένην. εἶτα λέχει, ὡς ἐκβληθεῖσα ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς, καὶ πλανωμένη ἀτίμως σκότιον ἐγέννησε τὸν Ἰησοῦν. Καὶ ὅτι οὗτος διὰ πέναν εἰς Αἴγυπτον μισθαρνήσας κακεῖ δυνάμεων τινων πειραθεὶς, ἐφ' αἷς Αἰγύπτιοι σεμνύνονται, ἐπανῆλθεν ἐν ταῖς δυνάμεσι μέγα φρονῶν, καὶ δι' αὐτὰς θεὸν αὐτὸν ἀνηγόρευσε.



thera;<sup>203</sup> and let us see whether those who have blindly concocted these fables about the adultery of the Virgin with Panthera and her rejection by the carpenter did not invent these stories to overturn his miraculous conception by the Holy Ghost: for they could have falsified the history in a different manner, on account of its extremely miraculous character, and not have admitted, as it were against their will, that Jesus was born of no ordinary human marriage. It was to be expected, indeed, that those who would not believe the miraculous birth of Jesus would invent some falsehood. And their not doing this in a credible manner, but their preserving the fact that it was not by Joseph that the Virgin conceived Jesus, rendered the falsehood very palpable to those who can understand and detect such inventions. Is it at all agreeable to reason that he who dared to do so much for the human race in order that, as far as in him lay, all the Greeks and barbarians who were looking for divine condemnation might depart from evil and regulate their entire conduct in a manner pleasing to the Creator of the world, should not have had a miraculous birth, but one the vilest and most disgraceful of all? And I will ask of them as Greeks, and particularly of Celsus, who either holds or not the sentiments of Plato, and at any rate quotes them, whether he who sends souls down into the bodies of men, degraded him who was to dare such mighty acts, and to teach so many men, and to reform so many from the mass of wickedness in the world, to a birth more disgraceful than any other, and did not rather introduce him into the world through a lawful marriage. Or, is it not more in conformity with reason that every soul, for certain mysterious reasons (I speak now according to the opinions of Pythagoras and Plato and Empedocles, whom Celsus frequently names), is introduced into a body and introduced according to its deserts and former actions? It is probable, therefore, that this soul also which conferred more benefit by its residence in the flesh than that of many men (to avoid prejudice I do not say "all"), stood in need of a body not only superior to others, but invested with all excellent qualities? (33) . . . By act of adultery between Panthera and the Virgin? Why, from such unhallowed intercourse there must rather have been brought some fool to do injury to mankind—a teacher of licentiousness and wickedness and other evils, and not of temperance and righteousness and the other virtues!<sup>204</sup>

<sup>203</sup> Celsus's statement of the infidelity of Mary, affirming that the father of Jesus was a soldier, by name Panthera, appears also in the Talmud, where the name is transliterated into Pandera. J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON (*Text and Studies*, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 25) thinks that this name is simply a Greek anagram on the word *παρθένος*, similar to "the literary tricks of that time." "Everything that we know of the dogmatics of the second century agrees with the belief that at that period the virginity of Mary was a part of the formulated Christian belief. Nor need we hesitate, in view of the antiquity of the Panthera fable, to give the doctrine a place in the creed of Aristides."

<sup>204</sup> ORIGENIS *Contra Celsum*, I, 32: 'Αλλὰ γὰρ ἐπανελθωμεν εἰς τὴν τοῦ Ἰουδαίου προσωποποιᾶν, ἐν ᾗ ἀναγράφεται ἡ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μήτηρ ὡς ἐξωσθεῖσα ὑπὸ τοῦ μνηστευσα-

Origen's polemic tactics in this passage are as good as his information and defense are imperfect in the following: *Against Celsus*, I, 37 (IV, 412):

But as a further answer to the Greeks, who do not believe in the birth of Jesus from a virgin, we have to say that the Creator has shown by the generation of several kinds of animals that what he has done in the existence of one animal he could do if it pleased him in that of others, and also of man himself. For it is ascertained that there is a certain female animal which has no intercourse with a male, as writers on animals say is the case with vultures, and that this animal without sexual intercourse preserves the succession of race. What incredibility is there, therefore, in supposing that, if God wished to send a divine teacher to the human race, he caused him to be born in some manner different from the common way? Nay, according to the Greeks themselves, all men were not born of a man and woman. For, if the world has been created, as many even of the Greeks are pleased to admit, then the first men must have been produced, not from sexual intercourse, but from the earth, in which spermatie elements existed; which, however, I consider more incredible than that Jesus was born like other men so far as regards the half of his birth. And there is no absurdity in employing Grecian his-

μένου αὐτὴν τέκτονος, ἐλεγχεῖσα ἐπὶ μοιχείᾳ καὶ τίκτουσα ἀπὸ τινος στριώτου Πανθήρα τοῦνομα· καὶ ἴδωμεν εἰ μὴ τυφλῶς οἱ μυθοποιήσαντες τὴν μοιχείαν τῆς παρθένου καὶ τοῦ Πανθήρα καὶ τὸν τέκτονα ἐξωσάμενον αὐτὴν ταῦτα πάντα ἀνέπλασαν ἐπὶ καθαιρέσει τῆς παραδόξου ἀπὸ ἁγίου πνεύματος συλλήψεως. ἐδύναντο γὰρ ἄλλως ψευδοποιῆσαι διὰ τὸ σφόδρα παράδοξον τὴν ἱστορίαν καὶ μὴ ὥσπερ εἰ ἀκουσίως συγκαταθέσθαι ὅτι οὐκ ἀπὸ συνήθων ἀνθρώπων γάμων ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐγεννήθη. καὶ ἀκούουθόν γε ἦν τοὺς μὴ συγκαταθεμένους τῇ παραδόξῃ γενέσει τοῦ Ἰησοῦ πλάσαι τι ψεύδος· τὸ δὲ μὴ πιθανῶς αὐτοὺς τοῦτο ποιῆσαι ἀλλὰ μετὰ τοῦ τηρῆσαι ὅτι οὐκ ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰωσήφ παρθένος συνέλαβε τὸν Ἰησοῦν, τοῖς ἀκοῦειν καὶ ἐλέγχειν ἀναπλάσματα δυναμένοις ἐναργὲς ἦν ψεύδος. ἄρα γὰρ εὐλογον τὸν τοσαῦτα ὑπὲρ τοῦ γένους τῶν ἀνθρώπων τολμήσαντα, ἵνα τὸ ὅσον ἐπ' αὐτῷ πάντες Ἕλληνες καὶ βάρβαροι κρίσιν θέλαν προσδοκήσαντες ἀποστῶσι μὲν τῆς κακίας πάντα δὲ πράττωσιν ἀρεσκόντως τῷ τῶν ὄλων δημιουργῷ, παράδοξον μὲν μὴ ἐσχηκέναι γένεσιν πασῶν δὲ γενέσεων παρανομιώτατην καὶ αἰσχίστην; ἐρῶ δὲ ὡς πρὸς Ἕλληνας καὶ μάλιστα Κέλσον, εἴτε φρονοῦντα εἴτε μὴ, πλὴν παρατιθέμενον τὰ Πλάτωνος· ἄρα ὁ καταπέμπων ψυχὰς εἰς ἀνθρώπων σώματα τὸν τοσαῦτα τολμήσοντα καὶ τοσοῦτους διδάξοντα καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς χύσεως τῆς κατὰ τὴν κακίαν μεταστῆσοντα πολλοὺς ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ τὴν πασῶν αἰσχυροτέραν γένεσιν ὠθεῖ, μὴδὲ διὰ γάμων γνησίων αὐτὸν εἰσαγαγὼν εἰς τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίον; ἢ εὐλογώτερον ἐκάστην ψυχὴν κατὰ τινος ἀπορρήτους λόγους (λέγω δὲ ταῦτα νῦν κατὰ Πυθαγόραν καὶ Πλάτωνα καὶ Ἐμπεδοκλέα, οὓς πολλὰκις ὠνόμασεν ὁ Κέλσος), εἰσκρινομένην σώματι κατ' ἀξίαν εἰσκρινεσθαι καὶ κατὰ τὰ πρότερα ἦθῃ; εἰκὸς οὖν καὶ ταύτην τὴν ψυχὴν, πολλῶν (ἵνα μὴ συναρπάξῃεν δοκῶ, λέγων πάντων) ἀνθρώπων ὠφελιμωτέραν τῷ βίῳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιδημοῦσαν, δεδεσθαι σώματος, οὐ μόνον ὡς ἐν ἀνθρωπίνῳ σώμασι διαφέροντος ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ πάντων κρείττονος.—33: ἀπὸ Πανθήρα μοιχεύσαντος καὶ παρθένου μοιχευθείσης; Ἐκ γὰρ τοιούτων ἀνάγκων μίξων ἔδει μᾶλλον ἀνόητόν τινα, καὶ ἐπιβλαβὴ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις διδάσκαλον ἀκολασίας καὶ ἀδικίας καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν κακῶν γενέσθαι οὐχὶ δὲ σωφροσύνης καὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀρετῶν.



tories to answer Greeks with a view to showing that we are not the only persons who have recourse to miraculous narratives of this kind. For some have thought fit, not in regard to ancient and heroic narratives, but in regard to events of very recent occurrence, to relate as a possible thing that Plato<sup>105</sup> was the son of Amphictione, Ariston being prevented from having marital intercourse with his wife until she had given birth to him with whom she was pregnant by Apollo. And yet these are veritable fables, which have led to the invention of such stories concerning a man whom they regarded as possessing greater wisdom and power than the multitude, and as having received the beginning of his corporeal substance from better and diviner elements than others, because they thought that this was appropriate to persons who were too great to be human beings. And since Celsus has introduced the Jew disputing with Jesus and tearing in pieces, as he imagines, the fiction of his birth from a virgin, comparing the Greek fables about Danae,<sup>106</sup> and Melanippe,<sup>107</sup> and Auge,<sup>108</sup> and Antiope,<sup>109</sup> our answer is that such language becomes a buffoon, and not one who is writing in a serious tone.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>105</sup> 427-347 B. C. <sup>106</sup> Made pregnant by Jupiter by means of a golden shower.

<sup>107</sup> Made pregnant by Hippotes, and gave birth to Æolus, metamorphosed into a mare and placed among the stars.

<sup>108</sup> Daughter of Aleus of Tegea, and mother of Telephus by Hercules.

<sup>109</sup> The mother of Anthion by Jupiter.

<sup>110</sup> ORIGENIS *Contra Celsum*, I, 37: "Ἐτι δὲ πρὸς Ἑλληνας λεκτέον, ἀπειθοῦντας τῇ ἐκ παρθένου γενέσει τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ὅτι ὁ δημιουργὸς ἐν τῇ τῶν ποικίλων ζῶν γενέσει ἔδειξεν ὅτι ἦν αὐτῷ βουλευθέντι δυνατόν ποιῆσαι ὅπερ ἐφ' ἐνὸς ζῴου καὶ ἐπ' ἄλλων καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων. εὐρίσκεται δὲ τίνα τῶν ζῴων θήλεα, μὴ ἔχοντα ἀρρενὸς κοινωνίαν, ὡς οἱ περὶ ζῴων ἀναγράφαντες λέγουσι περὶ γυνῶν· καὶ τοῦτο τὸ ζῶον χωρὶς μίξεως σφίξει τὴν διαδοχὴν τῶν γενῶν. τί οὖν παράδοξον, εἰ βουλευθεὶς ὁ θεὸς θεῖον τίνα διδάσκαλον πέμψαι τῷ γένει τῶν ἀνθρώπων πεποίηκεν ἀντὶ σπερματικοῦ λόγου, τοῦ ἐκ μίξεως τῶν ἀρρένων ταῖς γυναίξει, [ποιῆσαι] ἄλλω τρόπῳ γενέσθαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ τεχνησομένου; καὶ κατ' αὐτοὺς δὲ τοὺς Ἑλληνας οὐ πάντες ἄνθρωποι ἐξ ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικὸς ἐγένοντο. εἰ γὰρ γενητός ἐστιν ὁ κόσμος, ὡς καὶ πολλοὶς Ἑλλήνων ἤρεσεν, ἀνάγκη τοὺς πρῶτους μὴ ἐκ συνουσίας γεγενῆσθαι ἀλλ' ἀπὸ γῆς, σπερματικῶν λόγων συστάντων ἐν τῇ γῇ· ὅπερ οἶμαι παραδοξότερον εἶναι τοῦ ἐξ ἡμέσους ὁμοίως τοῖς λοιποῖς ἀνθρώποις γενέσθαι τὸν Ἰησοῦν. οὐδὲν δ' ἄτοπον πρὸς Ἑλληνας καὶ Ἑλληνικαῖς ἱστορίαις χρῆσασθαι, ἵνα μὴ δοκῶμεν μόνοι τῇ παραδοξῇ ἱστορίᾳ ταύτῃ κεκρήσθαι. Ἐδοξε γάρ τισιν οὐ περὶ ἀρχαίων τινῶν ἱστοριῶν καὶ ἡρωϊκῶν ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τινῶν χθὲς καὶ πρῶν γενομένων ἀναγράψαι ὡς δυνατόν ὅτι καὶ Πλάτων ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀμφικτιόνος γέγονε, κωλυθέντος τοῦ Ἀρίστωνος αὐτῇ συνελθεῖν, ἕως ἀποκυήσει τὸν ἐξ Ἀπόλλωνος σπαρέντα. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ἀληθῶς μῦθοι, κινήσαντες εἰς τὸ ἀναπλάσαι τοιοῦτό τι περὶ ἀνδρὸς, ὃν ἐνόμιζον μείζονα τῶν πολλῶν ἔχοντα σοφίαν καὶ δύναμιν καὶ ἀπὸ κρειττόνων καὶ θεοτέρων σπερμάτων τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς συστάσεως τοῦ σώματος εἰληφέναι, ὡς τοῦθ' ἀρμόδιον τοῖς μείζουσιν ἢ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον. ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸν Ἰουδαῖον ὁ Κέλσος εἰσήγαγε διαλεγόμενον τῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ διασύροντα τὴν, ὡς οἴεται, προσποίησιν τῆς ἐκ παρθένου γενέσεως αὐτοῦ, φέροντα τοὺς Ἑλληνικοὺς μύθους περὶ Δανάης καὶ Μελανίππης καὶ Αὐγῆς καὶ Ἀντιόπης λεκτέον ὅτι ταῦτα βωμολόχῳ ἔπρεπε τὰ ῥήματα καὶ οὐ σπουδάζοντι ἐν τῇ ἀπαγγελίᾳ.

In *Against Celsus*, I, 39 (IV, 413), mention is made of the sarcastic inquiry of Celsus as to just why God decided to have intercourse with this particular woman, but in the opinion of Origen such an irreverent question merits no reply. There is an argument in *Against Celsus*, II, 69 (IV, 459), based upon the burial of Jesus in the new tomb, to show that by analogy it was fitting for him to be conceived, not by ordinary generation, but of a virgin.

As would be expected, Origen's argument in defense of the virgin birth causes him to make the ordinary appeal to prophecy, which he regards as being minutely predictive.<sup>111</sup> The Immanuel passage is used in *Against Celsus*, I, 34, 35 (IV, 410 ff.), where from his linguistic studies Origen decides that עִלְמָנָה, which the Septuagint translates παρθένος, means technically a virgin, as is substantiated, in his opinion, by Deut. 22:23, 24. But by referring to Prov. 30:19 and Cant. 6:8 we are led to believe that his deduction was made upon too narrow a basis. Probably the best translation for Isa. 7:14 is "the young spouse."

The distinctive use of the New Testament is found in the relics which we have of Origen's commentaries on Matthew and John. In the former, Books VI, 7, and X, 17 (IX, 357, 424), treating of the opinion of Jesus' contemporaries as expressed in Matt. 13:55 ff., where Mary and the carpenter and his brothers are mentioned by name and his sisters referred to, he says:

But some say, basing it on a tradition in the gospel according to Peter, as it is entitled, or the book of James, that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife, whom he married before Mary. Now those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end, so that that body of hers which was appointed to minister to the Word which said: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, etc.," might not know intercourse with man after that the Holy Ghost came into her, and the power from on high overshadowed her. And I think it in harmony with reason that Jesus was the first fruit among men of the purity which consists in chastity, and Mary among women; for it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the first fruit of virginity.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>111</sup> E. g., *Against Celsus*, I, 37 (IV, 412).

<sup>112</sup> ORIGENIS *Com. Matt.*, X, 17: φασί τινες εἶναι ἐκ παραδόσεως ὁρμώμενοι τοῦ ἐκγεγραμμένου κατὰ Πέτρον Εὐαγγελίου ἢ τῆς βίβλου Ἰακώβου, υἱοὺς Ἰωσήφ ἐκ προτέρας γυναικὸς, συνφυκηκίας αὐτῷ πρὸ τῆς Μαρίας. Οἱ δὲ ταῦτα λέγοντες τὸ ἀξίωμα τῆς Μαρίας ἐν παρθενίᾳ τηρεῖν μέχρι τέλους βούλονται, ἵνα μὴ τὸ κριθέν ἐκείνο σῶμα διακονήσασθαι τῷ εἰπόντι Λόγῳ. Πνεῦμα ἅγιον κ. τ. λ. γυνὴ κόλτην ἀνδρὸς μετὰ τὸ ἐπελθεῖν ἐν αὐτῇ. Πνεῦμα ἅγιον, καὶ τὴν ἐπεσκιακυσία αὐτῇ δύναμιν ἐξ ὕψους. καὶ οἶμαι λόγον ἔχειν, ἀνδρῶν μὲν καθαρότητος τῆς ἐν ἀγνεῖᾳ ἀπαρχὴν γεγονέναι τὸν Ἰησοῦν, γυναικῶν δὲ τὴν Μαρίαν. Οὐ γὰρ εὐφημον, ἀλλήν παρ' ἐκείνην τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τῆς παρθενίας ἐπιγάσθαι.



In this passage Origen clearly accepts as agreeable with his own thinking the tradition of the perpetual virginity of Mary given in the gospel of James, while he differs from those who by their questions recorded in Matt. 13:55 evidently thought Jesus to be the son of Joseph. But just what does Origen mean by Jesus' being the first fruit among men of the purity which consists in chastity, and Mary's being the same among women? With regard to Jesus he seems to express it as a reasonable opinion that he was the first man born in purity, *i. e.*, whose conception and birth were chaste. Impurity and unchastity entered into the generation of all others. In the case of Jesus this purity was the result of the miraculous conception by the spirit of God, and his miraculous birth as related in the gospel of James, for the birth there described is free from pollution such as attended every other birth, and the virginity of Mary is preserved intact. But does Origen assert a like birth for Mary herself? It is more probable that he intends to give Mary only a somewhat *similar* place of purity among women, not asserting a virgin birth for her, but, in accord with the gospel upon whose representation he has already commented, ascribing to her superior chastity in her birth and upbringing. This is the impression given by the protevangelium, where the most remarkable child Mary is born to the aged Joachim and Anna, not of lust, but as the child of prayer, and is carefully shielded from all impurity. Similar births of male children are recorded in the Old Testament, but Mary is the first *woman* of whom we have such a record. Thus the influence of the protevangelium of James or of some similar tradition is very evident in shaping the thought and expression of Origen in this passage.

There is a reference to John 2:21 in *Com.*, X, 23 (IX, 403), where the query is raised as to whether "the temple of his body" means "the body which he received from the Virgin, or that body of Christ which the church is said to be." And the leaping of the Baptist in the womb of Elizabeth is taken to attest "his divine conception and birth."

Having dealt with the statements of the virgin birth and Origen's appeal to Scripture, especially prophecy and the gospels, we come to the ultimate theological position of Origen on the question. *De Principiis*, I, 2, 4 (IV, 247):

For those children of men which appear among us, or those descendants of other living beings, correspond to the seed of those by whom they were begotten, or derived from those mothers in whose wombs they are formed and nourished, whatever that is which they bring into this life and carry

with them when they are born. But it is monstrous and unlawful to compare God the Father, in the generation of his only begotten Son, and in the substance of the same, to any man or other living thing engaged in such an act; for we must of necessity hold that there is something exceptional and worthy of God which does not admit of any comparison at all, not merely in things, but which cannot even be conceived by thought or discovered by perception, so that a human mind should be able to apprehend how the unbegotten God is made the father of the only begotten Son. Because his generation is as eternal and everlasting as the brilliancy which is produced from the sun. For it is not by receiving the breath of life that he is made a son, not by any outward act, but by his own nature.<sup>113</sup>

Although Origen is not here dealing directly with the virgin birth as such, but rather with the problem of the creation of the pre-existent Son of God, still what he has to say has a double bearing upon the virgin birth; first, in that it flatly repudiates the thesis of Tertullian and others of the Fathers, that a god is born of a god, and that the laws which hold in the matter of human generation and offspring must be normative in the sphere of the divine. On the contrary, Origen, in a very laudable way, lifts the whole matter out of the realm of human parallel and says that, as when the sun first existed its rays went forth, so when God first existed (if such a time can be conceived) then inevitably the Son existed also. This idea has its bearing upon the virgin birth in freeing it from any thought of a nature imparted to Jesus, and in the second place makes the virgin birth an incarnation purely.<sup>114</sup>

The material of Origen is valuable for this study of the virgin birth in that it indicates what were the counter-stories in vogue among the Jews; that the Greek myths and the story regarding the virgin birth of Plato were widely discarded, while the virgin birth of Jesus was still

<sup>113</sup> ORIGENIS *De Principiis*, I, ii, 4: "Quoniam hi qui videntur apud nos hominum filii, vel caeterorum animalium, semini eorum a quibus seminati sunt respondent, vel earum quarum in utero formantur ac nutriuntur, habent ex his quicquid illud est quod in lucem hanc assumunt ac deferunt processuri. Infandum autem est et illicitum, Deum patrem in generatione unigeniti filii sui atque in subsistentia ejus exaequare alicui vel hominum vel aliorum animantium generanti: sed necesse est aliquid exceptum esse Deoque dignum cui nulla prorsus comparatio non in rebus solum, sed ne in cogitatione quidem, vel sensu invenire potest, ut humana cogitatio possit apprehendere quomodo ingenitus Deus pater efficitur unigeniti filii. Est namque ita aeterna ac sempiterna generatio sicut splendor generatur ex luce. Non enim per adoptionem spiritus filius fit extrinsecus, sed natura filius est."

<sup>114</sup> For the Gnostic refinement of the incarnation see *De Principiis*, II, 6 (IV, 282), where the union of the pre-existent Son with  $\psi\chi\eta$  prior to the latter's assumption of a body lessens the difficulty of God's mingling with matter.



generally maintained ; that the resort to prophecy was similar to that of former apologists, but with a show of more scholarship; that the mystic and spiritual import of the fact was, as would be natural from the Gnostic standpoint, of relatively the greatest importance ; and that this same spiritual sense freed the concept from some of its former grossness, and placed it beyond the realm of explanation ; while at the same time the virgin birth was an important witness to the true nature of him who, being pre-existent as the Son of God, nevertheless submitted to this wonderful incarnation. " His birth from the Virgin and his life so admirably lived showed him to be more than a man " (*Com. in Ioannem*, I, 34, [IX, 315]).

1. In the matter of the sources for the virgin-birth story Origen shows that there was no extra-canonical account to which the Jews in their bitter calumny could appeal, and that therefore they were forced to apply their inventive and spiteful genius to the canonical sources. All of the apocryphal sources were a heightening rather than a toning down or denial of the miraculous in the canonical accounts. That the heretics made use of these apocryphal elaborations is made quite probable from *Against Celsus*, I, 28 (IV, 408). In this passage there seems to be a heretical use of some gospel or gospels that narrated the miraculous doings of Jesus while in Egypt. (See, *e. g.*, Pseudo-Matthew, chaps. 19-24.) As for Origen himself, his chief appeal is to the canonical stories, but at the same time his references to the Gospel of the Hebrews and of Peter and of James, and his rather glad acceptance of the material which they afford, indicate the growing favor which the apocryphal gospels were receiving.

2. Origen's belief in the pre-existence of Christ as the Word is clearly stated, as is also the humiliation of the advent as taught by Paul. He believed in the miraculous conception and in the virgin birth as a real birth, and yet he exalted the whole matter above the rightful field for man's investigation and understanding, making it a more profound fact by far than the straight-going logic of Tertullian had assumed. Origen held to a combination, but hardly a harmonization, of the Johannine Logos philosophy and the simple account of the infancy sections of Matthew and Luke ; and in this combination the Logos philosophy was the predominant factor.

3. The item of chief importance contributed by Origen is his indication of the growing acceptance of the apocryphal view of the chastity of Mary as emphasized in the teaching of her perpetual virginity. This gradual advance upon the position of Clement of Alexandria is

what would be expected in the case of so severe an ascetic as Origen, and we should therefore be guarded against crediting the apocryphal sources with too wide an influence among Christians who were unaffected by the Gnostic philosophy.

X. HIPPOLYTUS (flourished 198-239).<sup>115</sup> The extant writings of Hippolytus state the theories of the virgin birth with great frequency and variety. Most of the views, however, are those that have already been noticed in other apologists and polemicists.<sup>116</sup> Among the less familiar views is that of the Sethians:

The Son . . . in the shape of a serpent entered into a womb in order that he might be able to recover that Mind which is the scintillation from the light.<sup>117</sup>

The Sethians had formed a threefold philosophy based upon light, spirit, and darkness, as the three fundamental elements. Light is that which is superior and above, darkness is its opposite, and spirit is between the two. Jesus came into human life to redeem the mind, which is light, encircled in the darkness of flesh. The Greek sophist Monoimus says:

The Son of Man . . . has been generated from the perfect man, whom no one knew; every creature who is ignorant of the Son, however, forms an idea of him as the offspring of a woman (*Refutation of All Heresies*, VIII, 6 [V, 121]).

Noetus expresses the Patripassian theory which found favor with the contemporary Roman bishops and served to make them odious to Hippolytus. The longer statement of this theory is in IX, 5 (V, 127), but the shorter one in X, 23 (V, 148) gives the gist of the matter:

And this heretic also alleges that the Father is unbegotten when he is not generated, but begotten when he is born of a virgin.

There is an interesting belief recorded in IX, 9 and 25 (V, 132, 148), showing how the Pythagorean influence had determined the theory of a certain heretic Elchasai, who

<sup>115</sup> EUSEBIUS, *Church History*, Book VI, 22.

<sup>116</sup> Orthodox statement = *Refutation of All Heresies*, VIII, 10; X, 29 (V, 123, 152); *Com. on Dan.*, III, 6 and 93 (V, 179, 188); *Homilies*, VI (V, 239); *Against Noetus*, IV (V, 225); and *Com. Prov.* (V, 174). Especially emphasizing the reality of Jesus' birth, *Refutation of All Heresies*, VI, 4 (V, 75); Valentinian and Gnostic views = *Ref. All Her.*, VI, 30, 31; VIII, 2 (V, 88, 90, 118); Carpocrates = VII, 20 (V, 113); Cerinthus = VII, 21; X, 17 (V, 114, 147); Ebionites = VII, 22 (V, 114); Theodotus = VII, 23; X, 19 (V, 114, 147); Apelles = VII, 26; X, 16 (V, 115, 147); Marcus = VI, 46 (V, 97); Docetic = VIII, 3 (V, 120).

<sup>117</sup> *Refutation of All Heresies*, V, 14; X, 7 (V, 66, 143).



asserts that Christ was born a man in the same way as common to all, and that Christ was not for the first time on earth when born of a virgin, but that both previously and that frequently again he had been born and would be born. Christ would thus appear and exist among us from time to time, undergoing alterations of birth, and having his soul transferred from body to body.

Then finally there is the Jewish belief

that his generation will be from the stock of David, but not from a virgin and the Holy Spirit, but from a woman and a man, according as it is a rule for all to be procreated from seed (*Refutation of All Heresies*, IX, 25 [V, 138]).

From the material above cited and quoted we may learn with what variety and in connection with what professedly philosophic vagaries the doctrine of the virgin birth was set forth. Had more of the writings of Hippolytus been preserved, we should undoubtedly be even more impressed with this fact, which means that the theological valuation of the doctrine steadily increased from what was in apostolic times a negligible quantity to what was now conceived to be of the most serious theological import. In the formulation of the church's belief, whether that most commonly accepted or that peculiar to the heretical sects, this doctrine, in some form or other, negative or positive, was sure to appear.

In examining the support which Hippolytus adduces from the Scriptures for the orthodox theory of the virgin birth we must, because of the fragmentary character of his writings, be satisfied with a more superficial defense than was offered by his great predecessors. No use is made of the Immanuel prophecy; but Daniel, Proverbs, and Psalms are the chief Old Testament authorities to which appeal is made. Prov. 9:1, "Wisdom hath builded her house," is taken to mean that Christ, the wisdom and power of God, took his covering of flesh from the Virgin. A fanciful comment is given on Cant. 4:16, "Awake, O northwind; and come thou, south. Blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow out":

As Joseph was delighted with these spices, he is designated the king's son by God; as the virgin Mary was anointed with them, she conceived the Word<sup>117a</sup> (V, 176).

In the comment on Dan. 3:26 there is a statement of the pre-existence

<sup>117a</sup> HIPPOLYTUS, *In Canticum Canticorum*, 4:16: "His aromatibus cum oblectatus esset Joseph, filius Regis a Deo designatur. His Virgo Maria cum uncta esset, in ventre suo concepit Verbum."

and activity of Christ before the virgin birth. There is also an obscure remark in the *Commentary on the Psalms* (V, 170):

But the Lord was without sin, made of imperishable wood as regards his humanity; that is, of the Virgin and the Holy Ghost inwardly, and outwardly of the Word of God, like an ark overlaid with purest gold.<sup>118</sup>

The main object here seems to be to show the purity of Jesus' conception. But what can be meant by Jesus' being made of the Virgin and the Holy Ghost *inwardly* and of the Word of God *outwardly*? The reverse statement would have been more easy of apprehension. Whether there is any serious theological concept at the basis of this similitude of Jesus to the ark, or whether the similitude is carried out for its own sake and on this account, the Word, as being the more precious and corresponding to the gold of the ark, is given an external place in the ontography of Jesus, is difficult to say, because at most the passage is only a fragmentary and fanciful comment on a Hebrew poem. If, however, the passage be taken at all seriously, it will be seen to teach that the Spirit and the Virgin produced the humanity of Jesus (*i. e.*, the Spirit is the cause of the conception of Jesus the human being, but does not impart divinity to his nature), and the Word is the divine element existing in union with this humanity. But it should be borne in mind that the primary emphasis of the passage is upon the purity and sinlessness of Jesus.<sup>119</sup>

The theological deductions from the virgin birth are clear and uniform. It took place in order that God might create anew the first-formed Adam: *Dan.*, VII, § 14 (V, 189); *Refutation of All Heresies*, X, 29 (V, 152); *Prov.* 30:29 (V, 175). In order to do this, the first-born God must be manifested in union with a first-born man: *Com. Luke*, 2:7 (V, 194); *Homilies*, IV, § 2 (V, 234), and VII, § 1 (V, 239); *Com. Psalm.*, 109, 110 (V, 170), "that by uniting his own power with our mortal body, and by mixing the incorruptible with the corruptible and the strong with the weak, he might save perishing man."<sup>120</sup> *Antichrist*, 4 (V, 205), and *Against Noetus*, 17 (V, 230). But the most compre-

<sup>118</sup> HIPPOLYTUS, *In Psalmum XXII*: 'Ο δὲ Κόριος ἀναμάρτητος ἦν, ἐκ τῶν ἀσέπτων ξύλων τὸ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἐκ τῆς Παρθένου καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἔσωθεν, καὶ ἔξωθεν τοῦ λόγου τοῦ θεοῦ, οἷα καθαρῶτάτῳ χρυσίῳ περικεκαλυμμένος. (These comments are gathered from quotations by THEODORET in his *First and Second Dialogue*.)

<sup>119</sup> See also comments on Pss. 109, 110 (V, 170), and *Prov.* 30:29 ff., treating of the first and second Adam; and meager New Testament references (V, 213, 236).

<sup>120</sup> HIPPOLYTUS, *De Christo et Antichristo*, IV: "Ὅπως συγκεράσας τὸ θνητὸν ἡμῶν σῶμα τῇ ἐαυτοῦ δυνάμει, καὶ μίξας τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τὸ φθαρτὸν καὶ τὸ ἀσθενὲς τῷ ἰσχυρῷ, σῶσῃ τὸν ἀπολλύμενον ἄνθρωπον.



hensive single statement is given in Fragment 8 of the *Treatise against Beron and Helix* (V, 234):

But the pious confession of the believer is that, with a view to our salvation and in order to connect the universe with unchangeableness, the Creator of all things incorporated with himself a rational soul and a sensible body from the all-holy Mary, ever virgin by an undefiled conception, without change, and was made man in nature, but separate from wickedness; the same was perfect God and the same was perfect man; the same was in nature at once perfect God and man.<sup>121</sup>

In Hippolytus, then, we find the greatest variety of theories of the virgin birth, a superficial resort to scriptural attestation, and a clear conviction that such a birth was necessary for the restoration to God of fallen and corrupt man. Mary is "all-holy" as well as "ever virgin," and her importance in the divine economy may be judged from the importance and greatness of the redemptive work undertaken by God through her sacred instrumentality.

1. In addition to the canonical accounts Hippolytus used some such apocryphal sources as the gospel of James or the gospel of Thomas.<sup>122</sup> This is evidenced by his expressions of "ever virgin" and "all-holy," and in general by the exaltedness ascribed to Mary.

2. In the passages which bear upon the virgin birth Hippolytus asserts the pre-existence of Jesus more than a dozen times. He goes even beyond the philosophy of John when he says that "the Creator of all things incorporated with himself a rational soul and a sensible body from the all-holy Mary, ever virgin," etc. Thus, as so often, the idea expressed in the prologue of John, because better calculated to support the divinity of Jesus, becomes the controlling factor in the representation of the advent of Christ. It will be seen that, while Hippolytus accepts Origen's trichotomous description of Jesus, he holds that both soul and body were assumed from Mary, whereas Origen held the soul was supplied as a medium whereby to reduce the harshness of the incarnation of God, the divine spirit.

<sup>121</sup> HIPPOLYTUS, *Contra Beronem et Heliconem*, VIII: 'Αλλ' εὐσεβῶς ὁμολογεῖ πιστεύων, ὅτι διὰ τὴν ἡμῶν σωτηρίαν, καὶ τὸ δῆσαι πρὸς ἀρεσίαν τὸ πᾶν, ὃ τῶν ὄλων δημιουργὸς ἐκ τῆς παναγίας ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας, κατὰ σύλληψιν ἀχραντον, δίχα τροπῆς, ἐνουσιώσας ἐαντῷ ψυχὴν νοερὰν μετὰ ἁλοθητικοῦ σώματος, γέγονεν ἄνθρωπος φύσει κακίας ἀλλότριος. ὁλος θεὸς ὁ αὐτός, καὶ ὁλος ἄνθρωπος ὁ αὐτός. ὁλος θεὸς ὁμοῦ φύσει καὶ ἄνθρωπος ὁ αὐτός.

<sup>122</sup> That Hippolytus used the gospel of Thomas see *Philos.*, V, 7: 'Εν τῷ κατὰ Θωμᾶν ἐπιγραφομένῳ εὐαγγελίῳ παραδιδόσιν λέγοντες οὕτως. 'Εμὲ ὁ ζητῶν εὕρησα ἐν παιδίοις ἀπὸ ἐτῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκεῖ γὰρ ἐν τῷ ἰδ' αἰῶνι κρυβόμενος φανεροῦμαι.

3. Hippolytus is of significance chiefly in showing how the apocryphal literature which, in its exaltation of Mary, served Clement as attractive illustration, and appealed to Origen as being in accord with reason, found unquestioned acceptance and unhesitating use.

XI. CYPRIAN<sup>123</sup> (bishop of Carthage, martyred 258) makes frequent quotation of prophecy and also of the gospel story, but all that he comments on or uses in any significant way is confined to three references. Two of these, *Epistles*, 72, §5 (V, 380), and *Treatises*, 6, §11 (V, 468), contain merely the statement of the virgin birth involving the pre-existence of Christ, as the Word and Son of God, who by the co-operation of the Holy Spirit entered a virgin and mingled with man in the birth, thus becoming a perfect mediator. The third reference, *Treatises*, Book II, 9 (V, 515), contains an echo of the Immanuel argument: "That this should be the sign of his nativity that he should be born of a virgin—man and God—son of man and of God."

1. The material of Cyprian is altogether too meager to warrant any broad deductions, but such material as we have reflects (1) a use of canonical sources only; (2) that he believed in the pre-existence and at the same time accepted the virgin birth, probably seeing in it, as did Tertullian his predecessor in Carthage, a consistent explanation of the humanity of the divine Christ.

XII. NOVATIAN, a Roman presbyter, in his work *De Trinitate*, chap. 24 (V, 635), written perhaps shortly after 256, makes a reference to the annunciation story in Luke, making especial use of the implicative force of *διὸ καὶ* in 1:35b. The heretics had not preserved the distinction between the "Son of God" and "Son of man" elements in Jesus. By the use of Luke 1:35 they had maintained that "man himself and that bodily flesh, that which is called holy, is itself the son of God." In reply, Novatian points out that the Scripture does not say, "Therefore the holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God," but it says, "Therefore *also*," and thereby implies that the Son of God is in the first place the Word of God which came into Mary by the Holy Spirit's operation and which sanctified the substances taken from her body for the formation of Jesus, permitting them to be called "holy" and in a consequential and merely secondary sense the "Son of God."

1. These passages from Novatian reveal his appeal to the infancy sections of Luke as "the divine Scriptures" and also verify the fact, before noted, that the heretics seem to have been shut up to the

<sup>123</sup> EUSEBIUS, *Church History*, Books III, VI, VII, XXXI.



canonical accounts as their only source of appeal in altering the generally accepted teaching of the virgin birth.

2. Novatian's theory is decidedly that of an incarnation, the indwelling of the pre-existent Christ, the Word, within Mary, and his taking from her and hallowing those physical elements necessary to his human self-revelation. The doctrine as stated by Novatian gets a natural setting in trinitarian theory. God's Son, the Word, is imparted to Mary by the Holy Spirit and from Mary is given to the world clothed in flesh, being still the Son of God, but, because of the human nature which he assumed, also Son of man.

3. Perhaps Novatian's chief contribution to the study is in his serious and hitherto unsurpassed attempt to harmonize John and Luke, and almost equally in his clear definition of the incarnation in trinitarian terms.

XIII. MALCHION (flourished about 270) seems to present a new view of the incarnation in a fragment of the epistle of the Antiochian synod (VI, 171):

He was formed in the first instance as man in the womb, and in the second instance (*κατὰ δεύτερον λόγον*) the God also was in the womb, united essentially with the human (*συνουσιωμένος τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ*), that is to say, his substance being wedded with the man.<sup>124</sup>

This statement, however, does not exactly touch the matter of the virgin birth, but leaves the way open for a theory of the generation of the body of Jesus either naturally or by miracle, and subsequent to the beginning of that process an infusion of a divine element or the Word. Thus the incoming of the Word would not be the cause of the generation, but, the generation being already under way by miraculous or natural initiative, the deifying element enters and differentiates Christ from all other men. But it would be very unsafe to more than admit the *possibility* of such a theory from an isolated fragment such as this; and, at any rate, the theory would collapse should "in the first instance" and "in the second instance" be shown to be logical rather than chronological, which is indeed probable.

What Malchion seems to be contending for is the actual union of the divine and the human in Christ, as distinct from the mere indwelling of the divine as a spirit inhabiting the body.

1. Nothing significant can be determined as to the sources used.

<sup>124</sup> MALCHION, *Epistola contra Paulum Samosatam*: "Formatus est principaliter ut homo in ventre; et secundario Deus erat in ventre *συνουσιωμένος τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ*, id est, copulata substantia ejus cum homine."

2. Malchion seems to be contending for an actual incarnation and a vital union of the divine with the human.

3. There is no significant increment to the study at this point.

XIV. ARCHELAUS (flourished about 277). In the *Disputation with Manes*, which is no doubt for the most part genuine, the objections raised against the virgin birth by the Gnostic dualism of the Manichæans are clearly set forth, and are seen to be objections not so much against the *virgin* birth as against any birth whatsoever. Since matter is inherently evil, how could the Son of God submit to be born of a woman? § 5 (VI, 182). Could the Son of God, he who could change himself into any semblance, and did change himself into the semblance of the sun, be under the necessity of having mother, brethren, or father, as is involved when Archelaus makes Joseph, his father, and Christ to descend upon him at the baptism? To adopt this belief would be to make him the Son of God by increase (*per profectum*), and not because of his essential nature. Then, too, if he were a real material man, is it not also necessary to consider the dove that descended as material; and how could it dwell within him? § 50 (VI, 226, 227). Moreover, if Jesus were the son of Mary, it was possible for him to have brethren either begotten by the same Holy Spirit, and hence like himself, or perchance the undefiled Virgin had subsequent intercourse with Joseph — all of which is unthinkable. The rebuke administered by Christ to the intruder who announced the approach of his mother and brethren (Matt. 12:47), together with his approval of Peter's confession (Matt. 16:16), go to show that Jesus was born of no human parentage whatever; § 47 (VI, 223).

In reply Archelaus points out the various uses of the term "father," showing that it may be used of the begetter or of the guardian of a child, or it may signify a certain privilege or revered standing because of age and position. In the first of these senses, God was the father of Jesus; in the second, Joseph could be called his father; and in the third, the title was applicable to David;<sup>195</sup> § 34 (VI, 207). Another

<sup>195</sup> ARCHELAUS, *Cum Manete Haeresiarcha*, § 34: "Ignorare vos non arbitror, quoniam *pater* unum quidem sit nomen, diversos tamen habet intellectus: alius enim pater dicitur eorum, quos naturaliter genuerit filiorum; alius vero eorum, quos tantummodo enutrierit; nonnulli vero temporis atque aetatis privilegio: unde et Dominus noster Jesus plurimos patres habere dicitur; nam et David pater ejus appellatus est, et Joseph ejus pater putatus est, cum nullus horum pater ejus fuerit veritate naturae. Nam David pater ejus dicitur aetatis ac temporis privilegio, Joseph vero lege nutriendi; solus autem Deus Pater ejus natura est, qui omnia per Verbum suum velociter nobis manifestare dignatus est."



argument is advanced from the fact that, the judgment being dependent upon the resurrection, and this upon the passion, and the passion in turn upon the birth from Mary, the whole Christian system would be undermined by the denial of such a birth; § 49 (VI, 225). Archelaus appeals to Phil. 2:7 to show how Jesus voluntarily humbled himself and took the form of a servant. He asserts, moreover, that the descending Spirit was only *like* a dove, and that Jesus' body made of Mary was the only tabernacle that had ever been equal to sustaining the Spirit which descended from God; § 50 (VI, 226).

There is also in the *Disputation* a noteworthy story of the doings of an impostor Terebinthus,<sup>126</sup> the disciple of one of Scythianus. This Terebinthus made great claims for himself in Babylonia, alleging, among other things, "that he was the son of a certain virgin." He was, however, cast down from a housetop by a spirit, and so perished. The incident indicates how this man of great pretensions simulated a birth like that ascribed to Jesus, but, unlike him, made such a birth a basis of appeal for establishing his own claims.

1. The material of Archelaus betrays no use of extra-canonical sources, and the Manichæans seem to have made no pretense at having biblical sources for their teaching, but to have evolved their doctrine chiefly from an extreme Gnostic philosophy. Their abhorrence of the thought that Mary could ever have become actually married to Joseph reveals the influence of apocryphal gospels, or of such material as is embodied in them.

2. Archelaus believed that Jesus was the Son of God (*i. e.*, God) and that he chose to be made man of Mary, the mother of God, and that upon the man thus born the Spirit or the Christ descended at baptism, reconstituting the willingly humiliated one, Christ and divine.

3. One contribution of Archelaus to the study is a clear definition of the uses of the term "father." His reference to Mary the mother of God (if not the touch of a later Latin hand) is an inevitable result of the dominant rigid trinitarianism stimulated by the increasing tendency to exalt Mary. A third increment to the study is the idea of the complete humanizing of God in the incarnation, necessitating a restitution by the descent of the Spirit at baptism. In this way it seems that Archelaus is the first of the Fathers to make an actual har-

<sup>126</sup> ARCHELAUS, *Cum Manete Haeresiarcha*, § 52: "Quo cum venisset, talem de se famam pervulgavit ipse Terebinthus, dicens omni se sapientia Aegyptiorum repletum, et vocari non jam Terebinthum, sed alium Buddam nomine, sibi que hoc nomen impositum; ex quadam autem virgine natum esse, simul et ab angelo in montibus enutritum."

monization of John and Luke by representing the complete change of deity into humanity and the birth as that of a human being not possessed of a dual nature.

XV. ARNOBIUS (flourished 290-310) says:

We worship one who is born of man . . . but if, while you know that they (the Greek gods) were born in the womb and that they lived on the produce of the earth, you nevertheless upbraid us with the worship of one born like ourselves, you act with great injustice. . . . You worship, says my opponent, one who was born a mere human being. Even if that were true, as has been already said in former passages, yet, in consideration of the many liberal gifts which he has bestowed on us, he ought to be called and be addressed as God (VI, 422).<sup>127</sup>

This very fairly represents the practical sort of defense that could be produced from the limited information of Arnobius, and in view of the immediate issue which confronted him in the gross heathen idolatry from which he had so recently been converted. The statements that Jesus "was born a man," "born a mere human being," point (in view of the reference to Greek myth and the implication of "even if that were true," § 37), not to the conclusion that Arnobius was ignorant of the virgin birth or, though informed on the theory, did not deem it worthy of mention or timely in the apology under consideration, but rather to the fact that his apology was of so primary a nature as to forbid emphasis upon the distasteful elements of Christianity or upon anything but the barest fundamentals of faith.

1. The material in our possession indicates an acquaintance with the virgin-birth story of Matthew or Luke, but not the slightest influence of the Johannine philosophy, and an entire absence of apocryphal elements.

2. These two references do not indicate that Arnobius made any theological deductions from the virgin birth (assuming that he was acquainted with the accounts of Matthew and Luke), but that, on the contrary and for his immediate practical purpose, based the claim of divinity upon the benefits which Jesus bestowed upon mankind.

3. He is of interest in the course of the study as representing a reversion to the virgin birth unaffected by the Logos doctrine.

<sup>127</sup> ARNOBIUS, *Adversus Gentes*, I, 37: "Natum hominem colimus. . . . Sin autem scientes uteris esse gestatus, et frugibus eos victitasse terrenis, nihilominus tamen nati nobis hominis abjectatis cultum: res agitis satis injustas. . . ." 42: "Natum hominem colitis. Etiam si esset id verum, locis ut superioribus dictum est, tamen pro multis, et tam liberalibus donis, quae ac eo profecta in nobis sunt, Deus dici appellari-que deberet."



XVI. LACTANTIUS (about 250-330) regards the virgin birth from a decidedly theological point of view. The Son of God, the Word, was first *spiritually* created by God; *Institutes*, IV, 8 (VII, 106). This was his first birth and in it no mother participated. His second birth was *physical*, of the Virgin's womb, and in it no father participated. By these two births he was constituted a "middle substance" between God and man, and was eminently fitted to be man's Savior. He was "the Son of God through the Spirit and the son of man through the flesh, that is, both God and man;" IV, 13 (VII, 112).<sup>128</sup>

1. The material of Lactantius reflects but slightly the influence of any sources save the canonical accounts<sup>129</sup> of the virgin birth and the Johannine Logos doctrine, but it is possible that apocryphal influence accounts for the epithet "holy" as applied to Mary.

2. His understanding of the virgin birth is schematic; and indeed he offers a partial rationale of John's Logos doctrine in pointing out that, while other spiritual beings were merely the breath of God, he who was subsequently born of Mary was pre-eminent among the angels in that he was the *articulate* breath of God, *i. e.*, the Word. But Lactantius does not differentiate the Word from "the Holy Spirit of God who descending from heaven chose the holy Virgin that he might enter into her womb." The virgin birth assured the human nature of the divine Christ, and constituted him a fit mediator for the lost human race.

3. The contribution of Lactantius to the history of the thought is of little interest except to show how the doctrine of the virgin birth as dominated by the Johannine philosophy was finding its place in the gradually hardening cast of a systematic theology.

XVII. METHODIUS (martyred about 311) has but one certain<sup>130</sup> reference to the subject in hand:

<sup>128</sup> LACTANTIUS, *Divin. Instit.*, IV, 13: "In prima enim nativitate spiritali ἀμήτητος fuit, quia sine officio matris a solo Deo Patre generatus est. In secunda vero carnali ἀπάρτος fuit, quoniam sine patris officio virginali utero procreatus est, ut mediam inter Deum et hominem substantiam gerens, nostram hanc fragilem imbecillemque naturam quasi manu ad immortalitatem posset educere. Factus est et Dei filius per spiritum, et hominis per carnem; id est, et Deus, et homo." See also chap. 25 and *Epitome*, 43 (VII, 126, 239).

<sup>129</sup> For use of a spurious quotation accredited to Solomon, but being probably a marginal interpolation of the Book of Wisdom, see *Institutes*, IV, 12, and *Epitome*, 44 (VII, 110, 239).

<sup>130</sup> His purported *Oration re Simeon and Anna*, which contains material germane to the virgin birth, is undoubtedly spurious and of much later date. The system of church festivals assumed in the work was not in existence at the time of Methodius; and the work gives evidence of being subsequent to the Nestorian controversy.

And thus, when renovating those things which were from the beginning and forming them again of the Virgin and the Spirit, he frames the same just as at the beginning. When the earth was still virgin and untilled, God, taking mold, formed the reasonable creature from it without seed. . . . (Chap. 5.) For when Adam, having been formed out of clay, was still soft and moist, and not yet like a tile made hard and incorruptible, sin ruined him, flowing and dropping down upon him like water, and therefore God, moistening him afresh, and forming anew the same clay to his honor, having first hardened and fixed it in the Virgin's womb, and united and mixed it with the Word, brought it forth into life, no longer soft and broken.<sup>131</sup> (Discourse III, chaps. 4 and 5 [VI, 318].)

1. Methodius seems to be informed and influenced by the canonical sources only.

2. His understanding of the virgin birth is that in it is an explanation of the dual nature upon the basis of a union of the Word with an impeccable human being, and also the assurance of the restoration of man to his primal purity.

3. The material of Methodius serves to verify in some degree the existence of the theologizing tendency reflected in Lactantius; and perhaps chiefly to recall again to our minds by a very striking example the dominant theological *method* of the entire ante-Nicene period.

XVIII. VICTORINUS (martyred about 311), in commenting on Rev. 1:16 (VII, 345 ff.), as illumined by Isa. 4:1, refers to Christ as "not born of seed;" and in elaborating 4:7 (VII, 348) says:

And in the figure of a man Matthew strives to declare to us the genealogy of Mary, from whom Christ took flesh. Therefore, in enumerating from Abraham to David and thence to Joseph, he spoke of him as if of a man. This conscious effort at representing God as human, which is ascribed to Matthew, is as far wide of the truth as the assertion that he gave the genealogy of *Mary*. A rather fanciful passage is found in the discourse on the *Creation of the World* (VII, 343), where he makes the day of the annunciation to Mary coincident with that on which Eve was deceived, and the day when "the Holy Spirit overflowed the virgin

<sup>131</sup> METHODIUS, *Convivium Decem Virginum*, III, 4: Ταύτη γὰρ ἀναζωγραφῶν τὰ ἐξ ὑπαρχῆς, καὶ ἀναπλάσσωσιν αὐτοῖς ἐκ Παρθένου καὶ Πνεύματος, τεκταίνεται τὸν αὐτόν. ἐπειδὴ καὶ κατ' ἀρχὰς, οὕσης Παρθένου γῆς ἔτι καὶ ἀνθρώπου, λαβὼν χοῦν, τὸ λογικώτατον ἐπλάσαστο ζῶον ἀπ' αὐτῆς ὁ θεὸς ἀνευ σπορᾶς. . . . Ἐτι γὰρ πληρουρούμενον τὸν Ἀδὰμ, ὡς ἔστιν εἰπεῖν, καὶ τηκτὸν ὄντα καὶ ὑδαρῇ, καὶ μηδέπω φθάσαντα, δίκην ὀστράκου, τῇ ἀφθαρσίᾳ κραταιωθῆναι, ὕδωρ ὥσπερ καταλειβομένη καὶ καταστάζουσα, διέλυσεν αὐτὸν ἢ ἀμαρτία. Διὸ δὴ πάλιν ἀνωθεν ἀναδεύων καὶ πηλοπλαστῶν τὸν αὐτὸν εἰς τιμὴν ὁ θεὸς, ἐν τῇ παρθενικῇ κρατειώσας πρῶτον καὶ πήξας μήτρα, καὶ συνενώσας καὶ συγκεράσας τῷ Λόγῳ, ἀτηκτον καὶ ἀθραυστον ἐξήγαγεν εἰς τὸν βίον.



Mary" coincident with that on which God made light. Other more important passages are found in a work *Against All Heresies* (III, 649-54), which is inserted in the text of Tertullian, but which in all probability comes from the pen of Victorinus. The treatise is a hasty review of the chief heretics from Simon Magus to Praxeas, and deals specifically with "*those who have chosen to make the gospel the starting-point of their heresies.*" Among these are Saturninus (prior to Irenæus and probably to Justin), who stated that the innascible (*innascibilem* probably an adaptation of *innoscibilem* = ἀγνώστος) God abides in the highest regions, and that Christ did not exist in a bodily substance, but in phantasmal form; and Basilides (about 120), asserting that Christ came to this world in a phantasm and was destitute of the substance of flesh; and the Ophites (second century prior to Irenæus) or Serpentarians, also asserting that Christ did not exist in the substance of flesh; and Carpocrates (about 130), denying that Christ was born of a virgin and maintaining that he was a mere human being born of the seed of Joseph, but superior to all men in the practice of righteousness and in integrity of life, hence only his soul was received into heaven, and there is no resurrection of the body. Cerinthus (about 100) also maintained that Christ was born of the seed of Joseph, while Valentinus (about 140) asserted that Christ was sent by the First-Father, Bythus, was not of the substance of our flesh, but, bringing down from heaven some sort of spiritual body, took nothing from Mary, but only passed through her as water through a pipe. Ptolemy (about 170), and Secundus (about 170), and Heracleon (about 170) held the same view as that of Valentinus. Marcus (about 150) and Colarbasus (second century prior to Irenæus) also asserted that Christ was not in the substance of flesh, but descended upon the natural Jesus—and there is no bodily resurrection.

Then the author mentions Cerdo (about 135), who believed in two gods, a superior and an inferior one, and that the Son of the superior God was not flesh, was not born of a virgin, was not born at all, but was a mere phantasm. Cerdo denied any bodily resurrection, and received only the gospel of Luke, and that in part. His disciple Marcion of Pontus agreed with him, as did Lucan, Marcion's disciple. Apelles, another disciple of Marcion, specified more particularly as to the body of Christ, saying that it was composed of a starry ethereal sort of flesh, which Christ gathered in his descent from the upper world, and the elements of which he restored to space after his resurrection and during his ascension. As for Tatian (about 140), "he wholly

savors of Valentinus." The followers of Æschines affirm Christ to be himself Son and Father. Theodotus, the Byzantine (prior to Hippolytus), admitted that Christ was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin, but held that he had no pre-eminence over other men except in righteousness; while a second Theodotus held a somewhat similar doctrine, asserting that Christ was inferior to Melchizedek, inasmuch as the latter was a mediator between God and *angels*, and surpassed Christ likewise in being, not only *ἀνάντων*, but also *ἀμήτων* and *ἀγενεαλογητός*. The heresy of Praxeas (about 200?) consisted in his belief that Christ was God the Father Almighty.

Of the above-stated beliefs that of Theodotus of Byzantium is perhaps the most striking, in that, while it admits the virgin birth, it denies the deductions commonly made therefrom, attributing to Christ only pre-eminent righteousness, and that not necessarily because of his unique birth. Theodotus had as a personal and determinative reason for holding this striking theory the fact that under persecution he had denied Christ, and it was a palliative to his conscience to maintain that after all he had not denied God, but man only.<sup>132</sup>

1. From the first three references of Victorinus it is clear that his own thought is controlled chiefly by the canonical infancy sections, while at the same time there is probably a hint of the influence of the fourth gospel in the expression that Christ took flesh from Mary. The other references, although not beyond a doubt those of Victorinus, give some idea of the widespread influence of Gnosticism in its various phases, and indicate that Gnosticism had no authoritative evangelical sources of its own to set over against the canonical gospels, but rather, so far as scriptural sanction was needed, fell back upon the canonical sources, resorting to whatever change or curtailment was found necessary.

2. Victorinus's understanding of the virgin birth is not clearly stated, but it is a practically safe deduction to credit him with the orthodox doctrine of an incarnation of God, the Word or Spirit.

3. The contribution given by Victorinus consists chiefly in the exhaustive survey of the heresies touching the virgin birth and in a clear verification of the fact that the heretics were always destitute of any authoritative starting-point save the canonical Scriptures.

XIX. PETER (bishop of Alexandria, martyred about 311) says :

Now God the Word in the absence of a man, by the will of God, who easily effects everything, was made flesh in the womb of the virgin, not

<sup>132</sup> See context and SCHAFF, *History of Christian Church*, Vol. II, p. 574.



requiring the operation of the presence of a man. For more efficacious than a man was the power of God overshadowing the Virgin, together with the Holy Ghost, who came upon her.<sup>133</sup> (Fragment on *The Godhead* [VI, 280, 283].) The extravagant nature of two remaining references makes somewhat against their genuineness. Such expressions as "the most blessed mother of God and ever-virgin Mary"<sup>134</sup> (*Genuine* [Acts VI, 267]) and "Our Lord and God Jesus Christ being in the end of the age born according to the flesh of our *holy and glorious lady*, mother of God and ever virgin, and of a truth of Mary the mother of God"<sup>135</sup> (Fragment 5 [VI, 282]) sound somewhat anachronistic, and of a piece with post-Nicene Mariolatry. But, after all, they are only a summary of the extravagant titles already applied to Mary, with the addition of "glorious lady."

1. Peter has as sources (Matthew), Luke, and John, but at the same time he shows the most marked influence of the apocryphal literature.

2. According to Peter, God the pre-existent Word was made flesh in the womb of Mary by the power of God overshadowing her and the Holy Spirit coming upon her. Probably the thought of Peter resembles that of Novatian in regarding the Spirit (or power) as imparting to Mary the Word, who thus became incarnate. As usual, the virgin birth is described in terms of an incarnation.

3. The very pronounced influence of the apocryphal literature is perhaps the chief increment which Peter of Alexandria makes to the study.

XX. ALEXANDER OF ALEXANDRIA (died about 326) states how that God, the Son, whose creation was beyond the power of the human mind to grasp, and who reigned with the Father in heaven, descended to earth and became incarnate in the Virgin's womb, assuming from her, who was thus constituted the mother of God, an actual body.<sup>136</sup>

1. Alexander shows the influence of the sources which have by this

<sup>133</sup> PETER OF ALEXANDRIA, *In Deitate*: 'Ο δὲ θεὸς Λόγος παρὰ τὴν ἀνδρὸς ἀπουσίαν, κατὰ βούλησιν τοῦ πάντα δυναμένου κατεργάσασθαι θεοῦ, γέγονεν ἐν μήτρᾳ τῆς Παρθένου σάρξ, μήτε δεηθεὶς τῆς ἀνδρὸς ἐνεργείας ἢ παρουσίας. 'Ενεργέστερον γὰρ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἐνεποιήσεν ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ δύναμις, ἐπισκιάσασα τῇ Παρθένῳ σὺν τῷ ἐπεληλυθότι ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι.

<sup>134</sup> PETER OF ALEXANDRIA, *Acta Sincera*: "Venerunt in ecclesiam beatissimae Dei Genetricis semperque virginis Mariae."

<sup>135</sup> PETER OF ALEXANDRIA, *Fragments*, V, § 7: ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν, καὶ θεὸς Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστὸς, ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων κατὰ σάρκα τεχθεὶς ἐκ τῆς ἁγίας ἐνδόξου δεσποίνης ἡμῶν θεοτόκου καὶ Ἀειπαρθένου, καὶ κατὰ ἀλήθειαν θεοτόκου Μαρίας.

<sup>136</sup> An addition in the codex, VI (VI, 302), gives also the reason for the virgin birth: "To raise erect lost man, re-collecting his scattered members."

time become common to all the writers contributing to the study, viz., the canonical infancy stories, the Logos teaching of the fourth gospel, and the apocryphal literature.

2. As is clearly the case subsequent to the time of Ignatius, and with the exception of Arnobius, Alexander's thought of the virgin birth is controlled by the Logos doctrine, becoming on that account an incarnation in a sense that would never be suggested by the infancy sections alone.

3. Alexander's contribution, standing, as he does, the last of these twenty ante-Nicene Fathers to contribute to the study, is that of an inheritor of the good and evil of his predecessors, in apology, in polemic, and in constructive theology. His representation is a product of the whole period, during which the child born in Bethlehem gained his title to messiahship and divinity and pre-existence, carrying up with him from her obscurity the humble mother who from "virgin" became "ever virgin," and from "ever virgin" "all-holy," and from "all-holy" to what was inevitable in the trinitarian thought—"mother of God."

XXI. *Conclusion.*—In making a recapitulation of this survey of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, we shall endeavor (1) to gather up the facts which throw light upon the sources used by the defenders and the opponents of the virgin birth; (2) to exhibit what theories the successive Fathers held as to the origin of him who was born of the virgin; (3) to point out the theological and apologetic use made of the doctrine; and (4) to indicate the bearing of the facts adduced upon the relation existing between the doctrine of Scripture and that which became the doctrine of the church, and to show the consequent need of a historical and untraditional interpretation of the canonical accounts of the virgin birth.

1. From the first post-apostolic reference to the virgin birth to the close of the ante-Nicene period, the modifying influence of the doctrine of the pre-existence is clearly traceable. Nowhere does the representation of Matthew and Luke get a distinctly separate and independent treatment or interpretation. It is true that the influence of the Johannine source is not as unmistakably present in Ignatius as in all the other Fathers (Arnobius excepted), but it is nevertheless present in sufficient power to give an interpretation which cannot upon any other basis be thought to spring from the Matthæan and Lucan material. If it is objected that Arnobius stands as an exception to this general statement, in that his interpretation of the virgin birth is uninfluenced by the Johannine material, the objection loses its



force from the fact that Arnobius gives absolutely no interpretation of the virgin birth, but only a few words of elementary apologetic. In one or two passages Justin Martyr (*Apol.*, I, 21) and possibly Tertullian (*Answer to Jews*, 13, and *Against Marcion*, IV, 10) betray the survival of the representation in the infancy sections; yet they show almost uniformly the influence of the doctrine of the pre-existence; while none of the other Fathers reflect the thought of the mere birth of a being generated in the womb of Mary; so that the Johannine source is dominant from the beginning of the second century to the Council of Nicæa.<sup>137</sup>

As early as Justin there is evidence of extra-canonical tradition concerning the infancy, but this tradition in no wise influences his argument. Tertullian plainly mentions the existence of other gospels of the nativity, but does not accept any such teaching as that of the perpetual virginity of Mary, thus showing that the teaching of such a gospel as that of James (the existence of which explains the reference of Justin, and also those of subsequent Fathers) did not commend itself to the defenders of the humanity of Christ. But the apocryphal material was more attractive to Clement of Alexandria, who used the teaching mentioned above for purposes of illustration merely, while his successor Origen went so far as to commend the reasonableness of it, and Hippolytus accepted it outright. Thus a third source entered to influence the church's interpretation of the virgin birth; and this source (in all probability the gospel of James) remained as a potent factor at the close of the period. The remarkable fact concerning the almost numberless heretical attempts to discredit the virgin birth—on the one hand, by a thorough naturalizing of it, and, on the other, by a thorough Docetic treatment—is that the heretics of either sort are shut up to a use of the canonical sources as the authoritative point of departure and the only recognized basis of appeal. There is some evidence<sup>138</sup> that the Jewish heretics were influenced by the infancy stories of Pseudo-Matthew, and that the Manichæans were influenced by the gospel of James, but, on the whole, the defenders of the Catholic faith were more subject to the infusion of apocryphal thought than were the heretics; while both fell back upon the canonical writings alone as the standard of authority.

<sup>137</sup> The Nicene Creed reads: "We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ . . . who for us men and for our salvation came down and was incarnate and was made man."

<sup>138</sup> ORIGEN, *Against Celsus*, I, 28 (IV, 408).

2. What has been said about the sources has, of course, its direct bearing upon the theories that were entertained as to the origin of him who was born of Mary; and, with one barely possible exception (that of Arnobius), the theories are uniformly dominated by the doctrine of the pre-existence. Justin and Tertullian may break away from the incarnation theory for a moment,<sup>139</sup> but never in such a way as to renounce it, even though its retention necessitates an inconsistency in their thinking. Predominantly, their theory is that of the incarnation of the Word, the Son, or the Spirit of God. With Tertullian and some of the subsequent Fathers, such as Novatian and Peter of Alexandria, there is an attempt to harmonize the theories of the pre-existence and the virgin birth by representing the Spirit or power of God as bearing to Mary at the time of her conception the Word who dwelt within her and from her assumed flesh; while Archelaus goes still farther in his harmonization by making the pre-existent Son of God become utterly devoid of his divinity in the virgin birth, and to be, apart from the miraculous conception, born as other men, being consequently thoroughly human prior to the descent of the Spirit upon him at baptism.

But even in the most elaborate attempt at harmonizing the two ideas, that of the prologue of John was still the dominant theory, and in the record of the post-apostolic thought placed the virgin birth in a light which it could not possibly have assumed to any reader unacquainted with the Johannine philosophy. There were then two theories present, but the one (that of the begetting of a new being by the miraculous exercise of divine power upon Mary causing her to conceive apart from intercourse with man) always subservient to the other (that of the incarnation of the inconceivably begotten and eternally pre-existent Word, Spirit, or Son of God).

3. Whenever the virgin birth frees itself for a moment from the doctrine of a pre-existence and an incarnation, it invariably appears as explaining the dual nature of Jesus. This is true in Ignatius and Irenæus, where the divine nature is thus explained, and in Tertullian especially, and Cyprian, Lactantius, Methodius, and Victorinus (probably), where the humanity of the divine Christ is made dependent upon the virgin birth. The doctrine of the virgin birth was from the first only one factor in the evolving theology, and it was natural at the beginning, in so far as it could at all be kept distinct, that it should lend its influence to a substantiation of the divinity of Jesus; and this

<sup>139</sup> JUSTIN MARTYR, *Apol.*, I, 21; TERTULLIAN, *Answer to Jews*, 13.



it did. But another and more potent factor was very early present to accomplish the same result, and so effectual was the Logos doctrine in securing this end that as early as the time of Tertullian it became necessary to use the virgin birth for the distinctly opposite purpose—that of insuring the real humanity of Jesus.

Several forces were militating against all that was natural and human in Christ. The profound conviction of his deity, the high estimate of asceticism, and the prevalence of various forms of Gnostic belief, which ever widened the impassable gulf between God and man, were not only relegating Jesus into a sphere beyond the reach of the church, but at the same time constituting the demand for perfect purity on the part of his mother, and such purity as in the minds of the orthodox themselves could be met only by perpetual virginity. Thus it is probable that the apocryphal inventions which reflected back upon Mary the purity and exaltedness of the Savior were only devout, though superficial, attempts to meet the need which a dominant trinitarianism and a profound belief in the sinfulness of human generation had awakened in the consciousness of the church.

It has been pointed out that the church began, not with one, but with two, opinions concerning the beginning of the earthly life of Jesus, and these two opinions such as were not easy of harmonization. Hence the confusion, and sometimes absurdity, into which those inevitably fell who endeavored to be faithful to the irreconcilable and early accepted interpretations of the two accounts, and the heresy which became the portion of those who, taking one or the other conception, pushed to the extreme limit the tendency therein represented. On the one hand were the Gnostics and the Docetics, true to the philosophic spirit out of which the Logos doctrine took its rise, but ignoring the all-important link which John welded in vs. 14 of his prologue, and consequently holding to an advent that was unaffected by humanity, or, in the more extreme and Docetic type of thought, was nothing more than a semblance or an apparition. On the other hand were Carpocrates, Cerinthus, the Ebionites, and others, who, taking the infancy sections, gladly accepted all that would contribute to the real humanity of Jesus, but denied the miraculous conception because used by others to prove the divinity of his nature. Between these limits were the great company of the orthodox who accepted literally the infancy sections and the prologue of John; and almost uniformly adhered to the virgin birth as the explanation of the dual nature of Jesus, first (and most nearly in accord with pagan thought) as an

explanation of his divinity, and afterward (for safeguarding the reality of his body) as an explanation of his humanity. As has already been implied, the *chief* theological use to which the ante-Nicene Fathers put the doctrine of the virgin birth, was that of substantiating the doctrine of the dual nature of Jesus; and such a use is an explanation of the relatively great importance attaching to the theory of the virgin birth throughout that early period. The fact of this cardinal use of the virgin birth cannot be overemphasized, and should be amplified by a further definition of the important corollaries which the Fathers deemed deducible from such an understanding and use of the doctrine.

In the first place, the virgin birth, being the currently accepted proof of the dual nature of Jesus, was used to prove consequently his complete fitness as a mediator between God and man. His ability to mediate was based neither upon his knowledge nor his character as such, but upon his dual nature as secured by a virgin birth. In the second place, the virgin birth served as an explanation of the sinlessness of the human nature of Jesus. All human beings from Adam down had been conceived and brought forth in sin. Not only did the taint of inherited sin rest upon them, but human procreation was in itself evil. By the virgin birth, however, Jesus was wholly freed from the latter, for he was not "stained by human generation;" while as to the former, the sin that might be inherited through Mary, that the early church blinked at until the devout and well-meaning apocryphal writers invented for her birth and upbringing such stories as would most effectually minimize the possibility of lust or impurity (as they conceived them) in the inception and entire course of her life. These stories the Fathers came to receive, and, with a miraculous conception and a birth that did not impair the virginity of Mary (who was chastely born of very aged and devout parents, and during her whole<sup>140</sup> life free from all knowledge of men), the purity of the human nature of Jesus was for all practical purposes, and in what seemed to them a practical way, thoroughly assured. In the third place, the fact that the virgin birth constituted him a perfect mediator and insured the sinless perfection of his human nature, made him the only savior of lost humanity. He was the new Adam, the first of a new race, and this antithesis is the constant and pertinent refrain throughout the entire patristic literature.

4. In concluding the study of the ante-Nicene Fathers, and in

<sup>140</sup> TERTULLIAN, *Monogamy*, 8 (IV, 65), *contra*.



pointing out the significance of the investigation offered in the foregoing pages, it is desirable to emphasize the distinction, referred to at the outset, viz., the distinction between the historical criticism of the Scripture narratives of the virgin birth and the use made of these narratives by the ante-Nicene Fathers. It is with the latter investigation only that this essay has to do, and for the present purpose questions as to the historicity or invention of the infancy sections are waived, for it is our present concern to interpret and to trace the history of the interpretation of these accounts, which, whatever their origin, very early came to be important sources for Christian theology. Whether the church feels bound to abide by the interpretation which the Fathers placed upon the virgin birth will, in the long run, depend upon its confidence in their ability and method as interpreters. From them alone has the church received its interpretation of the virgin birth. Nowhere outside of the infancy sections do the Scriptures contain any reference to it, either predictive or argumentative. If the method and culture out of which the accepted interpretation sprang have not been improved upon, if the allegorical method still suffices and a scientific culture which believed that certain animals, such as the vulture,<sup>141</sup> conceived without intercourse, or that others conceived by the wind,<sup>142</sup> and that the Son of God could enter the womb in the form of a serpent<sup>143</sup>—if these suffice for a time when there is at least some knowledge of the inevitable sequences of nature and of the value of historical interpretation, then the understanding and doctrinal import which the Fathers attached to the virgin birth need no revision.

But if, on the other hand, the Fathers were by the very nature of things incapable of interpreting correctly either the infancy sections themselves or the philosophic preface of the fourth gospel, it follows, not only as the privilege, but as the duty, of the interpreter to view independently and with the most and best light available those portions of the New Testament which by tradition alone have been made to carry what they did not originally contain. It is of some value to the theologian to know the history of the beliefs which are put into his hands for arrangement and ultimate verification. If this history of the interpretation of the virgin birth has succeeded in revealing the source

<sup>141</sup> ORIGEN, *Against Celsus*, I, 37 (IV, 412).

<sup>142</sup> LACTANTIUS, *Divine Institutes*, IV, 12 (VII, 110).

<sup>143</sup> HIPPOLYTUS, *Refutation of All Heresies*, X, 7 (V, 143). This conception, not of the orthodox, but of the Sethians, is nevertheless of value in indicating the scientific culture of the time.

and character of that interpretation, it may well leave its results, though meager, in the hands of the theologian to whose task this effort is but tributary.

### III. THE NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA.

The New Testament apocrypha in their treatment of the virgin birth differentiate themselves very clearly from the canonical and the patristic writings. The canonical accounts are chaste, brief, and unphilosophical; the patristic productions are more theological and inferential because of apologetic and polemic necessity; but the apocryphal writings are gross and prolix in the invention of details and the fabrication of a more exhaustive story. Just how impoverished and palpable these inventions are will best appear from an examination of those false gospels which in their original form at least belong to the period under consideration. Such an examination of the Gospel of James will suffice to give a correct idea of the more important apocryphal gospels in their relation to the virgin birth, for the Pseudo-Matthew and the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary are but recasts of the tradition earlier embodied in the Gospel of James, while the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy comes from the same source, augmented perhaps by some elements from the Gospel of Thomas.

*The Gospel of James.*—To ascertain exact dates for the New Testament apocrypha is next to impossible. Comparative and relative dates must suffice. We have proof of the presence of some such story as the Gospel of James in Justin's *Dial.*, 78, and, while this would not be conclusive for the existence and influence of the whole gospel in its present form, it would suffice to show that some of the elements of such a gospel existed prior to 166. Tischendorf places the original of the Gospel of James in the first half of the second century. The gospel as we have it has in all probability been worked over, but that the story in its present form is essentially the Jewish Christian work attributed to James and extant in the time of Justin is more than probable. An expression in Justin's *Dial.*, 101, is thought to be a quotation of the original of the Gospel of James: *καὶ χαρὰν λαβοῦσα Μαρία ἡ παρθένος*. Protevang.: *χαρὰν δὲ λαβοῦσα Μαρία*.

But these gospels seem to have been for a long time in a more or less nebulous state, seldom condensing into a rigid form, often reappearing in modified, abbreviated, or lengthened forms, but never securing sufficient recognition or esteem by the church to make Christians jealous of their exactness or preservation. So that the Gospel of James as we have it probably dates not prior to the latter part of the third century. Harnack<sup>144</sup> thinks that it is

<sup>144</sup> HARNACK, *Gesch. altchrist. Litt.*, II, 1, p. 725. "Das Protevangelium des Jacobus hat erst nach Origenes und vor der Mitte des 4. Jahrh. seine jetzige Gestalt



a compilation of three stories<sup>245</sup> and that it assumed its present form after the time of Origen and before the middle of the fourth century; but that the part treating of the birth of Jesus belongs perhaps to the second century, and the childhood history of Mary shortly before the time of Origen.

The substance of the gospel is as follows: Joachim, a rich Jew, possessed of a generosity similar to that of Tobit, wished to offer a double portion in the temple, but was rebuked because he was the father of no children. Having retired to the desert, he fasted and prayed for forty days, while his wife Anna mourned over her supposed widowhood and bitter childlessness. But as she sat in a garden lamenting, an angel came to her and announced<sup>246</sup> that she should conceive. About the same time an angel announced to Joachim the same fact, and two other angels came to tell Anna that Joachim was returning. In due time Anna brought forth a girl, and said, "'My soul has been magnified this day.' And she laid her down. And the days having been fulfilled Anna was purified and gave the breast to the child and called her name Mary."

When Mary was six months old she walked seven steps. Her mother made a little sanctuary for her in her own bedchamber and "allowed nothing common or unclean to pass through her." When she was a year old her father made a feast and invited "the priests and the scribes and the elders and all the people of Israel." The priests blessed the child. At the age of three her parents took her to the temple to be brought up, "and the priest received her and kissed her and blessed her, saying 'The Lord has magnified thy name in all generations. In thee, on the last of the days, the Lord will manifest his redemption to the sons of Israel.'" "And Mary was in the temple of the Lord as if she were a dove that dwelt there, and she received food from the hand of an angel." When she was twelve years old an angel directed Zacharias to assemble the widowers of the people, and to whomsoever the Lord should show a sign, his wife should Mary be. The lot fell to the aged Joseph, out of whose rod there came a dove. And the priest said to Joseph, "Thou hast been chosen by lot to take into thy keeping the virgin of the Lord." Joseph went away to build a house for his new charge, and

erhalten; der Abschnitt über die Geburt Jesu (Joseph-Apocryphum) gehört vielleicht dem 2. Jahrh., der Abschnitt über die Jugendgeschichte der Maria (der Hauptabschnitt des Buches) kann erst kurz vor Origenes entstanden sein; der Zachariasabschnitt hat seine jetzige Form wohl erst nach der Zeit der Origenes erhalten."

<sup>245</sup>(1) The history of the conception, birth, and life of Mary up to the period covered by the canonical stories; (2) the story of the birth of Jesus narrated by Joseph and therefore in an apocryphum of Joseph; and (3) an apocryphum of Zacharias.

<sup>246</sup>In the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary nearly all of the subsequent history of the child to be born is made known to the mother in the annunciation, and the sinlessness of Mary's manner of conception is strongly emphasized. Chap. 3 of the Gospel of the Nativity throws considerable light upon the objective and subjective sources out of which these apocryphal traditions took their rise.

when he returned found that Mary was six months with child. He was greatly distressed, fearing that his guardianship had been criminally lax. Mary asserted her innocence, and in Joseph's perplexity as to what he should do an angel appeared to him with substantially the same message as that recorded in Matthew. The priests discovered Mary's condition, and both Joseph and Mary were brought up for trial and acquitted by their own protestations of innocence and the test of Numb. 5:11 ff. "And there was an order from the emperor Augustus that all in Bethlehem of Judea should be enrolled." Before reaching Bethlehem Mary's time was fulfilled. Attended by Joseph's sons she entered a cave; Joseph went in search of a midwife and fell into a sort of trance in which he saw all the creatures of the earth awestricken. A midwife coming down from the hill-country met him, and after Mary had given birth to her son testified to Salome that Mary was a virgin.<sup>147</sup> Salome, disbelieving, examined Mary and found it to be so, whereupon her hand was stricken with a deadly disease, but by the instruction of an angel she placed her hand upon the child, who immediately healed it. Then follows the story of the magi, the rage of Herod, Mary's concealment of Jesus in an ox-stall, the earth's opening to protect Elizabeth and John, Zacharias's refusal to tell where John was hidden and his consequent murder. "And I James wrote this history in Jerusalem, a commotion having arisen when Herod died, withdrew myself to the wilderness until the commotion in Jerusalem ceased, glorifying the Lord God who had given me the gift and the wisdom to write this history. And grace shall be with them that fear our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory to ages of ages. Amen."

The primary purpose of this religious novel is to assign to Mary such a manner of birth and upbringing as befits the virgin mother of the Lord, and secondarily to further substantiate, by citing the details of an alleged examination, the fact of Mary's virginity, not only before, but after the birth of Christ. The strenuous emphasis upon the divinity of Jesus had, as we have seen, inevitably exalted the standing of his mother, and, as the historical theologians have pointed out, this overemphasis became almost equivalent to robbing the church of a Christ capable of sympathy with the merely human. Hence the turning to Mary. But by what method could the exalted position of Mary be supported? The fact was that the church saw her, as it were, in midair, half-way between the Christ deified beyond men's grasp and the church on earth largely destitute of a sense of the approachableness of God. Some visible superstructure must be erected to support Mary in her serviceable but precarious position—something forsooth to keep her from falling to the level of the sin-conscious world, and something perhaps to keep her from vanishing into heaven whither the thoroughly deified Christ had withdrawn.

<sup>147</sup> Pseudo-Matthew (chap. 13) goes even farther, claiming that Mary underwent none of the experiences of parturition but became a mother in a painless and mysterious way.



The material and the details for such an undertaking were not far to seek. Greatness, even that of Jesus, depended upon lineage; and most of the notables of heathen myth and Old Testament story were designated as such by extraordinary features attending their births. Not only in extra-canonical myth, but in the Jewish Scriptures, giants and heroes were thought to be the offspring of gods and women, Gen. 6: 2-5. Isaac was the son of a barren woman of ninety years by a father a hundred years old. Jacob was the son of a barren mother, and his strange action at the time of his birth was, so Yahweh said, prophetic of his assured greatness. The mother of Joseph was barren until that great patriarch was given in answer to prayer. The babe Moses had a wonderful deliverance. The birth of the mighty Samson was announced to the barren wife of Manoah by an angel. Samuel was given to the barren Hannah in answer to prayer and to take away her shame from the eyes of the people; and John the Baptist came as the child of the barren Elizabeth advanced in years, and the aged priest who had ceased to hope for offspring. Our composer was directed not only by these regulation requirements for the production of a notable character, but he had also the full benefit of a developed angelology such as was contained in the Old Testament and elaborated in current thought. Angels are always convenient in such narratives. He also possessed the canonical story of the virgin birth. This was his starting-point.

Accordingly the story is wrought out chiefly upon the model of that of Samuel, great care being taken to emphasize the purity of Mary in her food, surroundings, and occupation.<sup>148</sup> It is hardly necessary to point out the use of the canonical New Testament in the account of Joachim's retreat into the desert and his forty days' fast, or in the blending of the Lucan and Matthæan stories in the annunciation to Joachim (§ 4), or in Mary's visit to the temple at the age of three and her utter lack of desire to return home with her parents (§ 7). These, together with many other items and the almost literal use of Matt., chap. 2, in §§ 11, 12, 13, 21, and 22, prove beyond a doubt that the protevangelium is simply a purposeful, though not deeply serious, elaboration of the canonical infancy sections; and it is equally clear that the author's aim is so to reflect upon Mary the miraculous circumstances attributed to the birth of Jesus as to give her advent a purity and a glory in keeping with her exalted position.

A different conscience from that exhibited in the patristics is at work. They, with slight exceptions subsequent to the time of Clement of Alexandria, made a strenuous and dogmatic use of the canonical material. Nor did they resort to invention even in apologetic and polemic stress. The literary conscience of the apocryphal writers, on the contrary, was not satisfied with the most advantageous use of the accepted sources, but under false names attempted to add to the sources just those elements which would best explain

<sup>148</sup> For the acme of this effort, see the Sahidic fragment, *Texts and Studies*, IV, 2, p. 15.

the religious situation in which it found itself. From such a conscience, confronted by a practical theological problem, but devoid of the required skill, and also destitute of the deep seriousness of the canonical and patristic writings, sprang the teaching of the perpetual virginity of Mary.

The Gospel of Thomas and the History of Joseph the Carpenter differ from the Gospel of James and its derivatives in that the former adopt the point of view of the Johannine philosophy and find the idea of an incarnation<sup>149</sup> more in accord with their Docetic purpose. But the Gospel of James is practically sufficient to indicate the contribution of the so-called New Testament apocrypha to the study of the virgin birth. In a word, they push back a step or so farther, and hence wholly past the point of credibility, the remarkable features of the canonical infancy stories.

<sup>149</sup> See also *Pseudo-Clementina*, "Two Epistles Concerning Virginity," Ep. I, VI (VIII, 56, 57), and "Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena," chaps. 14, 15 (IX, 209). And for spurious material purporting to be ante-Nicene see *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, Book V, 16 (VII, 446); VI, 6; VII, 36, 37, 41; VIII, 1; *Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God*, I (IX, 169), IV, V, XXIII, XXV, XXVI, XXVIII, XXIX; *Apocalypse of Paul* (VIII, 579); *Book of John Concerning the Falling-Asleep of Mary* (VIII, 587-91); *Vision of Paul*, § 41 (IX, 162) and § 46; *Acts of Philip* (VIII, 502); *Acts and Martyrdom of Andrew* (VIII, 512); *Martyrdom of Bartholomew* (VIII, 554); *Gospel of Nicodemus*, Part II, chap. 12, first Latin version (VIII, 453); *Mar Jacob, Homily on Habib the Martyr* (Syriac), (VIII, 712); *Liturgy of James*, 6 (VII, 538), 29, 35, 44.



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